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by

© Sydney O. Singh

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Abstract

The object of this study is to draw together concerns which seem to preoccupy West Indian novelists in their imaginative writings, and to show how various authors differ in the handling of the same topics. There are five chapters in this study, each chapter devoted to a major area of concern.

The study opens with a discussion of novels which recreate the oppressive social and economic conditions under which the West Indian urban masses live. Chapter II picks up this theme from another perspective: it looks at works in which the authors explore the possibilities of relief from such socio-economic oppression. Chapter III moves away from novels of intense social realism, only to concentrate on the individual in search for personal and national identity. The body of fiction written on this subject is considerable, certainly more than enough to justify the extensive treatment it is given. Chapter IV deals with novels written on the West Indian experience abroad. The study concludes with an examination of works in which the experiences of West Indians who return home are depicted.

These categories, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Many of the works studied touch upon several aspects of West Indian reality; consequently, the decision to include a work in a particular chapter is made on the basis of what appears to be its

central concern. The concentration on the main preoccupation of a novel, however, does not necessarily mean the exclusion of other areas of interest that the work may contain. More importantly, whilst the explicit purpose of this study is to identify certain recurrent themes in West Indian fiction and to show how they are dealt with in several texts, its implicit aim is to provide a critical analysis and evaluation of each work that features significantly in the study.

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Table of Abbreviations

ACLALSB	ACLALS Bulletin (Mysore, India)
ArielE	Ariel: A Review of International English Literature
BO	Black Orpheus
CLAJ	College Language Association Journal
CV	Caribbean Voices [Transcripts of radio broadcasts on file at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica]
CQ	Caribbean Quarterly
CS	Caribbean Studies
IFR	International Fiction Review
JBS	Journal of Black Studies
JCL	Journal of Commonwealth Literature
JJ	Jamaica Journal
LHY	Literary Half-Yearly (Mysore, India)
NewL	New Letters [Formerly University Review]
New Lit. Rev.	New Literary Review (Canberra)
NWQ	New World Quarterly
RevI	Revista/Review Interamericana
RIB	Revista Interamericana de Bibliografia
SBL	Studies in Black Literature
SNNTS	Studies in the Novel
SoRA	Southern Review: An Australian Journal of Literary Studies
WLWE	World Literature Written in English

Introduction

The West Indian novel no longer requires an introduction. Studies on its historical origin and evolution, its social and cultural background, and its central concern with the lives of ordinary people are now readily available. Well known too are the remarks on its explosive growth during the last few decades, its distinctive nature and variety. Dr. Kenneth Ramchand has done for West Indian creative writing what F.R. Leavis has done for English imaginative literature. The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), his first book, may be said to have put the West Indian novel on the literary map of the world; his second, An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature (1976), is a fine collection of essays. Critical articles on the individual works of the more prominent authors abound, and books on V.S. Naipaul continue to proliferate. But there is yet to emerge a study that draws together the concerns which West Indian novelists consistently explore in their fiction. The present undertaking hopes to fill this gap.

A systematic survey of West Indian prose fiction reveals the presence of the five major areas of interest which make up the corpus of this study. Born in a social and cultural revolution, the West Indian novel, after over fifty years of steady growth, still retains heavy traces of the circumstances that led to its emergence.

There is not a single novel that does not draw attention, however tangential it may be, to the West Indian colonial heritage of social and economic oppression. Accordingly, this study opens with a discussion of the novels which describe this condition and its effects. Chapter II picks up this theme from another perspective: it looks at works in which the authors explore the possibilities of relief from such social oppression.

Of probably more concern to West Indian novelists than the despairing effects of poverty on the lives of the urban masses is the absence in the West Indies of a culture with which the West Indian can identify and be identified. The body of fiction written on this theme is considerable, certainly more than enough to justify the extensive treatment it is given in Chapter III. A sense of alienation in their own society and a lack of material prospects combine to drive hundreds of thousands of West Indians overseas in search of both self-hood and livelihood; indeed, emigration has always been, and still is, an inescapable fact of West Indian life. It is therefore not surprising that the recreation of the West Indian experience abroad now occupies a central place in the stream of West Indian fiction, and provides us with the topic for Chapter IV. The final chapter, 'The Return of the Native,' is an inevitable outcome of the previous one. As the title indicates, it analyses works that deal with the problems that confront the West Indian on his return home.

These categories, of course, are not mutually exclusive. Many of the works studied touch upon several aspects of West Indian reality; consequently, the decision to discuss a novel in a particular chapter is made on the basis of what seems to be its central concern. Denis Williams's Other Leopards (1963) and O.R. Dathorne's The Scholar-man (1964), for example, describe the failures of their protagonists to identify emotionally and culturally with Africa, to which they come in quest for origins. To discuss these novels in Chapter IV, 'Journey into Disillusion,' would be quite in order, but because the emphasis appears to be on the dramatic search for roots in both works, it seems more useful to include them in Chapter III, 'Rootlessness and the Search for Identity.' It is for this reason also that Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement (1960), usually seen as a novel of flight and exile, is examined in the context of the search for self-definition. Similarly, it seems more useful to discuss Naipaul's The Mimic Men (1967) in Chapter V, as a work that deals with the return of the native, and not as a study of rootlessness, although the work is responsive to this interpretation.

The concentration on the main preoccupation of a novel does not necessarily mean the exclusion of other areas of concern that the work may contain. Similarly, and more importantly, whilst the explicit purpose of this study is to identify certain recurrent themes in West Indian fiction and then show how the various authors differ in their handling of them, its implicit aim is to provide a critical analysis and evaluation of each work that features significantly in the study.

CHAPTER I

The Reality Behind the Myth

The image of the West Indies as a tropical paradise is as old as its written history. It began with Christopher Columbus, and over the centuries it was perpetuated by the accounts of European visitors who wrote ecstatically about the warm climate, the beautiful scenery, the luscious vegetation, and the friendly, hospitable natives. Today, with the West Indian islands always in dire need of large doses of foreign currency to salvage their economies, the image is exploited for all its commercial worth. To lure American and Canadian dollars, official travel brochures proclaim the Caribbean as the place for the ideal vacation. The advertisements show palm trees on sandy beaches, clear blue waters, huge luxury hotels, black women with baskets on their heads laden with exotic fruits, and men in shirt-sleeves and short-pants, with big grins and beads of perspiration on their faces, dancing to the rhythms of steel band music. Implicit in these scenes is the suggestion that life in the West Indies is primitively idyllic; the people lead a blissful existence, free from the cares and anxiety of modern life. In reality, nothing is further from the truth.

Much has been written in recent years by social scientists to debunk this myth, but only spasmodically and peripherally. For although they invariably remark on the extreme poverty that prevails in the West Indies, contemporary social issues do not engage their critical attention with the kind of urgency and systematic study that they deserve. The sociological analysis of West Indian slave society and the anthropological recovery of ancestral cultural remains seem to absorb their energies more than the socio-economic situation in modern West Indies. If we seriously wish to discover the terrible reality that lies behind the myth, it is to the works of West Indian novelists that we have to go. There is hardly a West Indian novel that does not make reference to the West Indian colonial legacy of social oppression and economic deprivation, some directly, others obliquely. The concern in this chapter is only with the former, a group of novels which are united by the intense social consciousness with which they were written.

For the West Indian writer who wants to expose the oppressive socio-economic condition under which the urban masses live, setting does not pose a problem. He does not have to imagine one. Every island has its own 'Dungle.' But, more often than not, he opts for the 'yard.' The following description, by C.L.R. James in the story 'Triumph,' of the contour of a typical yard and the kind of people who dwell in it, explains the reason for the choice:

> Every street in Port-of-Spain proper could show you numerous examples of the type: a narrow gate-way leading into a fairly big yard, on either side of which run long, low buildings, consisting of anything from four to eighteen rooms, each about twelve feet square. In these lived the porters, the prostitutes, carter-men, washerwomen and domestic servants of the city.
>
> In one corner of the yard is the hopelessly inadequate water-closet, unmistakable to the nose if not to the eye; sometimes there is a structure with the title of bathroom, a courtesy title, for he or she who would wash in it with

> decent privacy must cover the person as if bathing on the banks of the Thames; the kitchen happily presents no difficulty; never is there one and each barrack-yarder cooks before her door. In the centre of the yard is a heap of stones. On these the half-laundered clothes are bleached before being finally spread out to dry on the wire lines which in every yard cross and recross each other in all directions.[1]

James makes use of the yard as the locale for his novel Minty Alley (1936); so do Roger Mais in The Hills Were Together (1953) and, more recently, Roy Heath in A Man Come Home (1974). But it is Alfred Mendes, James's contemporary, who wrote the first socially realistic novel of the yard. Black Fauns (1935) is more or less an expansion of 'Triumph.'

The general critical observation on the quality of an immediate second novel, though not necessarily true, applies to Black Fauns. The novel lacks the conscious literary craftsmanship that Mendes displays in Pitch Lake, written the year before. Flatly episodic in structure, the book leaves 'social realism' as the only discernible principle of unity. But it is necessary to note, at once, that Black Fauns differs considerably from the typical realistic novel; it lacks the kind of particularity and observable physical details that we usually associate with social realism. Mendes seems to be more interested in the social relationships, the quality of which should reveal the milieu both socially and economically. Interestingly, the first concrete description of the setting of the novel comes very late in the narrative, and at a time when the reader has already become fully aware of the desperate social and economical condition of a group of washerwomen, on whom the novel concentrates, in a slum yard in urban Trinidad:

> Sunlight poured from the skies and a light wind went rustling through the large leaves of the breadfruit-tree. From the gutter that ran diagonally across the yard rose a strong stale stench. . . . The heap of bleaching stones in the centre of the yard was completely covered over with the washing jobs of the women, and on the lines hung sheets and dresses and underwear of every description. For this work the women earned between ten and fifteen dollars a month, out of which they paid their rent of three dollars and got food, supplemented, of course, by what their men gave them. The rooms were about twelve feet by twelve, and in this particular barrack, built on land standing away from the street, all the doors and windows gave onto the yard which was seventy-five feet wide by thirty feet deep; so that the two rows of rooms, extending along the width of the yard, faced each other.
>
> (Black Fauns, pp. 89-90)

Social criticism of this nature surfaces intermittently in the novel and with varying degrees of obtrusiveness, along with some gratuitous glances at various aspects of West Indian middle-class pretensions. On the whole, though, Mendes subordinates his compassionate view of human destitution to an impulse to draw a picture of low-life that capitalizes on its exotic appeal. Sex and obeah, intrigue and mystery, emotional and physical violence all come together in this lively and racy novel. But if Mendes sacrifices his personal vision for a wider readership, he does retain his good taste and a sense of proportion. The same cannot be said, for example, of Sonny Ladoo, a young Trinidadian, whose appearance on the West Indian literary scene ends all too briefly with his sudden and mysterious death in his island home. Ladoo's first novel, No Pain Like This Body (1972), is no less exotic than Black Fauns, despite its touching, dramatic portrayal of futile human struggle against a relentlessly hostile nature. But his second novel, Yesterdays (1974), borders on pornography; it is a vulgar and obscene piece of prose fiction that makes a mockery of West Indian realities in order to pander to an overseas audience.

But the real difference between Mendes and Ladoo is not so much a matter of propriety as it is a question of sensitivity. Ladoo does not merely deflate his characters satirically, as Naipaul does, for example; he caricatures them with a vengeance. Mendes, on the other hand, takes a humanistic view of his people. He sympathizes deeply with them, even loves and respects them. The black fauns are a talkative and argumentative bunch of women who constantly bicker and feud among themselves. Yet Mendes invests them with dignity and humanity. Despite their narrow surroundings, they never bemoan their existential condition; in fact, they accept their situation with philosophical equanimity. Sensitive and energetic, spontaneously generous and collectively helpful when the need arises, the fauns often allow their mutual regard and concern of each other to transcend their personal differences. The episode in which Miriam and the fiery Ethelrida clash over Mamitz finely illustrates this quality:

> "Miss Miriam, you can speechify high, you can speechify low; you not going to change my mind about her. And I have a warning to give you, you hear! You an' me goin' fall out over dat same one fine day, you hear!"
>
> "Don't talk like dat, child. You know I like you, Miss Et'elrida. You know I respect you. I sure you don't mean what you say."
>
> Ethelrida hung her haughty head and was silent for a while. Then, taking her friend by the hand, she murmured: "I sorry, Miriam," -- she dropped the Miss rarely -- "I ask you pardon. I take them words back. When I in anger, I does say what I don't mean."

> "You have nothing to ask pardon for, Etelrida," was Miriam's tender reply. "I know you good, an' you knows I'se your friend."
>
> (Black Fauns, p. 107)

What is particularly impressive in this little dramatic scene of reconciliation is the way in which Mendes manages to achieve the effects of poignancy and sincerity through the use of dialect. As a matter of fact, a main centre of interest in Black Fauns is the considerable length to which the author goes to promote the creative use of dialect in West Indian fiction; in consequence, it deserves a mild degree of consideration.

Black Fauns is narrated in the third person by an omniscient author, and except for the narrative sections, which are very brief and largely connective in function, Mendes allows the action of the novel to flow directly from the characters themselves: the ladies muse and speculate on behavioural motives; they describe and comment on the events and incidents which take place; Mendes even lets them dilate on a number of subjects which have no thematic relevance at all. Because Mendes depicts his fauns as compulsively polemical, such discussions as occur, plainly digressive as they are, do not reflect the loss of control, only a lack of consciousness of the necessity for aesthetic economy. These dramatic scenes, needless to say, are done in everyday speech, and not as it is actually spoken in real life: Mendes artfully modifies it. The ladies speak a language that is easily understood; yet it is distinctly dialectal in its rhythm, freshness, and expressiveness. Later novelists, such as Naipaul, Selvon, and Salkey, may be said to use the common language more inventively and imaginatively, but none can claim greater honesty and credibility in its usage.

If there is any reservation in this connection, it is to be found in the self-consciousness with which Mendes tries to give the novel a complete 'dramatic' structure. His renunciation of the privilege of omniscience in order to hand over the narrative to his dialect-speaking ladies appears too deliberate. Characterization also suffers. The yard-dwellers define themselves through their speech and action; but because Mendes reveals so little of their inner lives, they come through as identifiable but not fully realized beings. Martha is probably the only character who involves the reader dramatically. Quiet, naive, and extremely shy, Martha remains in the background for a greater portion of the narrative. With the arrival of Snakey, Mendes forces the action to coalesce around the lonely, impressionable girl. Her love for Snakey, born in fantasy, grows into an obsession; later, as the novel moves to its conclusion, it erupts in a murderous assault on the sensuously beautiful but unscrupulous Mamitz. With Martha, Mendes comes close to an independent study of the psychological disintegration of a young woman, whose intense need for love and emotional security makes her the easy victim for moral and sexual exploitation.

Martha's brutal attack on Mamitz brings to a climax a series of disasters that severely depletes the yard, and prompts this exclamation from Aggie:

> "Eh-eh. . . . it looks like as if God vext with this yard in truth. Miss Et'elrida in jail, Miss Estelle in jail, nobody know what going to happen to poor Mart'a; Mannie

> in jail, Seppy dead, Snakey gone, Miss Mamitz in hospital lying down like as if she dead, with her face all cut up and her bosom all cut and a stab in her back -- eh-eh, it is good t'ing me an' Lestang ain' living here!"
>
> (Black Fauns, p. 326)

Mendes ends the novel with the death of Mamitz. But life in the yard does not break up, as it does at the end of Minty Alley. If there is a 'message' or 'philosophy' in the novel, it is Miriam who utters it:

> "The earth get sun an' the earth get rain. We too put here to laugh an' to cry. We can't help that. Before we was born, that was happening; now we living it happening too, an' when we dead and gone the same t'ing going to happen. Sun an' rain, laugh an' cry -- we can't help that!"
>
> (Black Fauns, p. 326)

The fact that Mendes uses Miriam all through the novel as the voice of sanity confirms our suspicion that he too considers that human pain and joy belong to the larger rhythm of natural life.

A year after the publication of Black Fauns, C.L.R. James wrote Minty Alley. This novel too is set in a yard in the slum section of Trinidad, and like Mendes, James also does not succumb to the temptation to fill his work with grim, naturalistic details. And yet, as in Black Fauns, the world of Minty Alley comes through as dingy and sordid, and the life of dreariness, futility, and despair that James describes invades our consciousness and lingers with us long after we close the book. But if the nature of the fictional environments and the vision of human life in the two novels are similar, the differences which separate them are even more noticeable. Minty Alley is informed by a highly personal vision, embodied in a tightly woven dramatic structure. Like Michael Anthony in

The Year in San Fernando (1965), James observes the classical unities of time, place, and action with as scrupulous a fidelity as he does the more modern unities of theme, tone, and technique.

Minty Alley is narrated from the point of view of its central character, Haynes, a middle-class young man who is forced to seek cheap lodgings in No. 2 Minty Alley. James neatly ties in this economic necessity with the protagonist's desire to escape from spiritual stagnation: 'His life was empty. . . . The sea of life was beating at the walls which enclosed him' (p. 23). It is this need to break away from the monotonous world of respectability in which he grew up that makes Haynes much more than a narrative device: 'The novel is really about the mutually impoverishing alienation of the educated West Indian from the people.'[2] Although the structure of the sentence is not too clear, the observation it contains is an illuminating one. Nonetheless, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that in Minty Alley James creates a situation in which the middle-class West Indian and the working class people are brought together, and in the process gradually come to recognize their mutual humanity. The whole novel dramatizes this process, early indication of which is given when Haynes finalizes his arrangements with Mrs. Rouse to rent one of her rooms. The social gulf which has traditionally kept them apart narrows dramatically: 'He stood for a second uncertainly, and then, quite spontaneously, offered his hand. She took it with a little start of surprise, and looked at him so kindly and with such a gratified smile that he could see that he had made a good impression on his future landlady' (p. 27).

Warmly human as this gesture may seem, James does not allow the occasion to benumb his sense of social realities. For although he manages to avoid the all too common practice of West Indian novelists to represent the middle class West Indian as contemptuous of the black masses, James goes on to intimate that Haynes does not plan to include in his relocation any social intercourse with the yard-dwellers; a resolution that is quite consistent with his consciousness of his social superiority, and one which the novel quickly and ironically dissolves.

At first, the drabness of Minty Alley depresses Haynes. But as the vividness and vitality of the inhabitants of the yard, and the potentially explosive life they lead in ironic defiance of their pathetic circumstances impress upon his consciousness, his gloom dissipates. His voyeuristic discovery of the surreptitious affairs of his landlord, Benoit, with the maid Wilhelmina and the lodger Nurse Jackson aborts his decision to leave. The repertoire of his personal experiences does not include such clandestine activities; in his innocence, they seem to belong to the pages of fiction rather than to the stuff of real life. Haynes is ecstatic; comically so, as James describes his reaction: 'Haynes fell on his bed, his eyes hurting from the strain. He was no longer sleepy. Instead, he was very much alive. In fact, he behaved quite idiotically. He balanced himself on the small of his back and kicked his feet up in the air' (p. 37). But if Haynes finds the trysts of his landlord an amusing diversion for his boredom, James conceives them as the basis for a tense human drama that unfolds against a background of dire poverty and social oppression.

Affairs of the heart provide Minty Alley with its emotional structure. Although the main narrative action pivots around Benoit, who, to begin with, animates it, it is on Mrs. Rouse, the woman with whom Benoit lives in concubinage, that James chooses to focus his attention. Haynes, who by this time has been drawn into the life of the yard, notes with deep compassion the 'pain and shame and weariness' that register on Mrs. Rouse's face when she discovers the affair between the nurse and her common-law husband. But Haynes could not begin to imagine the intensity of her emotional distress. When Benoit abandons her and marries the nurse, Mrs. Rouse collapses physically, and starts to disintegrate psychologically. All her efforts to forget Benoit prove futile as well as her schemes to win him back. It is not until the end of the novel that the reader learns the nature of her compulsive love for Benoit: '"God put this fiery love in my heart for Mr. Benoit, Mr. Haynes. I try to root it out, but it wouldn't come out"' (p. 238). Indeed, it is this obsessional love for Benoit that explains, retrospectively, her dismissal of her faithful worker, Philomen, and her final confrontation with, and humiliation by, her niece, the impish Maisie. Were James in a satirical frame of mind when he conceived Mrs. Rouse, he could have easily made her passion for her deceitful lover seem ridiculous. Instead, he treats her compassionately, and allows her to preserve her dignity to the very end. Mrs. Rouse's love for Benoit endures triumphantly, even if it has taken a heavy toll on her. The final image of Mrs. Rouse is of a woman broken by the fret and fever of life but at peace with her conscience, having decided to care for the paralysed Benoit, now deserted by his wife, for the rest of his life: 'Mrs. Rouse sat in an upright chair, her fingers clasped in her lap, her shoulders bent and leaning forward, very tired, but no sign of mental conflict, only a calm determination' (p. 236).

With the death of Benoit, Mrs. Rouse sells the house at No. 2. Haynes finds new lodgings. But even before the yard life breaks up, James makes Haynes disenchanted with Minty Alley. The sudden departure of Maisie, with whom he has had more than a casual relationship, revives his former loneliness. Memories of the sprightly girl, who has broken down his reserve and has made 'a human creature out of him,' torture his imagination. The yard becomes, as it has always been to Maisie, a veritable prison. Haynes longs to leave; so when Mrs. Rouse informs him of the sale of the property, he welcomes the news. His stay at Minty Alley has been more than an answer to his economic problem, more than an interlude in his life; it was a memorable and richly rewarding experience that will survive his departure. In that barrack-yard, Haynes has successfully taken the plunge into the 'sea of life.' From now on he can face its challenge with confidence and assurance. But the author of Beyond a Boundary (1963) is too acutely sensitive to the brutal social realities in the West Indies to imbue Haynes with a full and mature consciousness. For however much he allows Haynes to grow in personal awareness and imaginative freedom, he presents the character, in the final analysis, as a product of his society. Haynes too understands this, as is made abundantly clear in his awareness of the reason why his relationship with Maisie could not have gone on: 'He would sometime or the other find another girl friend. But another Maisie, never. Why had he let her go? But how could he have kept her?' (p. 228). James does not allow Haynes to pursue his train of reflection to its logical conclusion; he tactfully leaves it up to the reader to draw the inference: Haynes is not rebelliously individualistic enough to eschew the traditional social attitudes of his class. To continue his affair with Maisie can only result in mutual pain; the girl simply does not belong to the right class. In this regard, the observation that Haynes makes earlier in the novel in connection with the strange relationship between Benoit and the white nurse becomes a comment on the structure of his own values: 'Benoit didn't seem the type of man to attract her. He was very black, with no compensation of money, profession or personal charm to atone for the social and economic disadvantages of his black skin' (p. 48). Nurse Jackson apparently does not place as high a premium on colour and class as both Haynes and Benoit do: the older man, as we may recall, abandons Mrs. Rouse mainly because the nurse has 'nice colour' and 'straight hair'; the younger man does not encourage Maisie to stay because of her inferior social status.

Evidently, Minty Alley does not lack social criticism. But it is equally obvious that James allows his commentary on the West Indian social scene to emerge dramatically. Nowhere in the novel is this method more impressively seen than in James's characterization of Maisie. On the surface, Maisie seems hardly more than a provocative slip of a girl, whose puckish activities serve at once to relieve and exacerbate the tension in the yard. On closer scrutiny, James invests Maisie with a much more dramatic role in the general critical design of the novel. It is through Maisie, to begin with, that Haynes comes to realize the peculiar lack in his life. The changes Maisie effects in Haynes make him greatly revise his conception of the world and his position in it. Technically, James uses Maisie to enlarge the narrative perspective. More fully aware than Haynes of what goes on behind the scenes, Maisie fills in the details which Haynes could not possibly supply, even though James contrives to place him at the centre of the yard where he can observe all the activities. More pertinently, it is through Maisie that James effects his most telling criticism of the socio-economic situation that he depicts. James creates Maisie as an extremely sensitive girl, who struggles to retain her vital sensibilities amidst squalid surroundings, from which she can find no escape, in the only way she knows how: through defiance, scorn, and contempt. Her successive skirmishes with Mrs. Rouse, her antagonism to Philomen, her mischievousness and insouciance are all psychological defence mechanisms against the boredom, emptiness, and purposelessness which characterize her existence, and threaten to dehumanize her. No one understands Maisie, not even Haynes, whose concern for her does not go beyond attempts to prevent a further escalation of her volatile relationship with her aunt. Haynes's privileged upbringing makes it impossible for him to enter imaginatively into Maisie's predicament. He sees her only as a refractory girl. But if the world of Minty Alley has very little to offer Maisie in the way of a normal human life, it has made her tough enough to face the outside world. Thus at the end of the novel, when Maisie breaks decisively with Haynes and leaves for the United States, we have no doubt that her self-reliance, worldly-wisdom, and moral resilience will carry her safely through. On the imaginative level of the novel, Maisie represents the triumph of individual assertion over economic and social pressure.

To attach so much significance to a character whose lack of solidity in actual narrative presentation scarcely indicates her dramatic worth is to claim for the artistic imagination that is at work in Minty Alley a subtlety that testifies to a fine creative intelligence. More importantly, though, James's analysis of West Indian social realities in terms of their deterministic psychological and emotional effects on human relationships anticipates the concerns which were to engage the younger generation of West Indian novelists who currently occupy the West Indian literary scene. To put it this way is to imply that Minty Alley transcends the tradition of social realism that dominates the early stage in the development of West Indian imaginative literature, and which the novel itself helped to establish. To appreciate James's achievement fully, we need only to turn to Mais's The Hills Were Joyful Together. In this work, we encounter virtually the same material; only the vision and emphasis differ: in Minty Alley, the social scene gradually eases its way into the background as the human problems increasingly edge themselves to the foreground; in The Hills Were Joyful Together, it is the social criticism that predominates. Because this novel is more expressive of the concern of this chapter than any other novel, I shall devote more time and space to it.

It is generally agreed that The Hills Were Joyful Together has a much more powerful emotional impact on the reader than either of Mais's other novels, Brother Man (1954) and Black Lightning (1955), even though it is artistically inferior to both of them in characterization, formal unity, and technical assurance. Beyond this, critical unanimity dissolves, and the variety of response that the work evokes suggests that the vision of life it seeks to communicate is either ambiguous or complex. Early commentaries on The Hills, both local and overseas, scarcely contain any critical analysis, and seldom exceed the general observation that it is a 'crudely realistic' novel that deals 'with poverty and its degrading effects on people in the atmosphere of the slums of Kingston.'[3] Later studies, to be sure, do not deny the presence of social comments in the novel, but they see it as only an ancillary concern. Bill Carr is the representative of this attitude. In a general essay on Mais, Carr describes The Hills as an 'allegorical work,' in which 'the yard, its setting and its people' are emblematic of the human condition:

> The vision of the novel is of humanity confined within a pitiless universe that turns all questions into purely rhetorical questions, as there are never answers forthcoming. The yard, the prison, the suffering and deprivation, then, are not finally data of a particular society, not

> simply the consequence of colonialism and class selfishness. They are elements of the universe.[4]

This is a perceptive interpretation of The Hills, one that fully embodies the novel's central theme of imprisonment. What is disconcerting, though, is the considerable length to which Carr goes to play down the topicality of the work in order to promote its metaphysical import. In this regard, Mais himself leads the way. Choric passages, similar to the quotation below, punctuate the narrative:

> This is the story of man's life upon earth that formed him . . . it shudders throughout from cover to cover with terror and pity . . . the demons of light and of darkness inform all his days and nights . . . it has been attested that he is of threefold dimensions . . . all his being is encompassed about from birth with dying . . . his separate death matters nothing . . . it matters all, that he has turned his back upon life.
>
> (The Hills, p. 184)

But the world of The Hills is only secondarily metaphorical. Primarily, it is a real place, a microcosm of contemporary urban Jamaican slums. So too is the Spanish Town prison, where Surjue is held prisoner; it is as real as the prison camp in Solzhenitsyn's First Circle (1968). A concern with the universal applicability of the theme of the novel is as critically limited an approach to the work as an exclusive concentration on its immediate social relevance. For although the significance of the novel does transcend its local appeal, much of its authority, power, and authenticity derives from its immersion in a reality and experience uniquely West Indian in character. This conviction, at any rate, informs the analysis that follows.

'My purpose in writing The Hills Were Joyful Together,' Mais announced soon after the publication of the novel, 'is to give the world a true picture of the real Jamaica and the dreadful conditions of the working classes.'[5] In his determination to establish Mais as something more than a social protest writer in The Hills, Carr invokes the 'intentional fallacy': '[W]e don't have to take him at his own estimate. Mais's vision as an artist was too strong for his own didactic estimate to have any essential relevance to the book.'[6] Again, the justice of this remark can hardly be denied. We do not have to go far into the novel to realize that Mais's artistic sensibility continually chafes against the limitation of his socially conscious aim and seeks to express itself in human predicaments which are not social in origin, let alone symptomatic of the specific social world he depicts. We only have to refer to the anguish that Euphemia experiences as she awaits the inevitable; to Manny, the young man who yearns for Euphemia, and grovels before her, even though she spurns him disdainfully; to Charlotta, who stoops patiently to a sordid and tyrannical relationship with her husband, Bedosa, whose moral poverty is reflected in his dyspeptic condition, ruthlessness and brutality, and in the way he demoralizes his wife with his exhaustive demands, trivial complaints, and insensitivity. Yet, when Bedosa dies, Charlotta is inconsolable: neither words nor tears can ease the heaviness of her grief.

But if it can be said that Mais's declaration of intention oversimplifies his actual achievement, there is no reason to dismiss it summarily: we are indeed drawn into a fictive world that accurately reflects the real one in all its brutal poverty, squalor, and appalling miseries. At every turn there is malnutrition, hunger, and disease. The scene in which Flitters pauses in his marathon flight across the city evokes a nauseous reality:

> They were a hideous bunch, taken all together. A child the other side of the woman had its two eyes stuck down with matter. He was trying to force them open with his fingers, whimpering, choking, his nose running with a three-days cold. One man had no nose at all, only two holes in the middle of his face, the legacy of a dose of syphilis. Another had running sores all the way up one leg, to his knee, and that foot was about three times the size of the other.
>
> (The Hills, p. 227)

From this horror, Mais takes us 'through back streets and alleys of gloomy, interminable slums' into yet another scene of desolation:

> Stark old tumbledown two- and three-storey houses rose up out of the palpable shuddering greyness, seemed to totter together in a nightmarish huddle above the narrow, evilly-leering, gutted streets.
>
> The smell of wet tar-roads scarred and sun-blistered and night-sweating rose up to his nostrils, mingled with the odours of rancid vegetable oil stale with cooking, dry-rot in old timbers overlaid with the liverish green of damp mildew.
>
> The wind blew across the carelessly swept-up heaps of untended roadside garbage where dogs, scuffling, snarling, fighting, had been before.
>
> (The Hills, p. 228)

Within these grey walls in ruin hide wretched beings, physically and morally deformed; below on the sidewalks of the 'leprous street,' strew human derelicts: loathsome, putrid, cancerous. 'Storm Warning' [one of Mais's unpublished novels] contains a passage that neatly sums up the nightmarish existence of the inmates of these 'rows and rows of stark lean-to tenements': 'The sun comes up over the city by the sea and the warmed-up cadavers uncoil from sleep and the anodyne of uninhibited sex and give themselves over to the frustration and hunger and disillusionment and emptiness and panic and despoilation and decrepitude and deception of another day.'

Interestingly enough, Mais does not dwell upon the historical source of this pervasive poverty, but he does make it clear that it is, contrary to what Carr says in the quotation above, a direct 'consequence of colonialism and class selfishness.' From his acid reference to the 'big-gutted heavy-jowled dyspeptic,' whose bank balance swells from the exorbitant rent he collects from his lean-to tenements, Mais proceeds to mount a savage attack on the complacency of the middle class which chooses to ignore such realities:

> There were nice people who thought, ain't old slums awfully quaint-looking and romantic, and in their own way beautiful? . . . people who had nice manners sitting in restaurants eating, and smelt of expensive toilet water, and spent the afternoon, by appointment, at the hairdresser, or sitting smoking cigarettes and reading the latest Book-of-the-Month selection steaming their pores in hot scented baths.
>
> (The Hills, p. 228)

Mais obviously intends this rebuke to find its target, but from an artistic point of view, the criticism is purely gratuitous. Authorial objectivity seems to crumble as Mais allows his anger and exasperation at the smugness and indifference of the Jamaican bourgeoisie to overwhelm his awareness of the necessity for dramatic presentation. Elsewhere in the novel, however, Mais keeps his indignation under better control, and manages to carry out his social criticism much more dramatically and effectively.

It should be obvious by now that the theme of poverty runs much too consistently through The Hills for us to devote only a passing glance to it. It is not my intention to give the impression that the work is nothing more than a compassionate sociological treatise on grim physical destitution; rather, it is to restore a necessary emphasis. Taken in its entirety, The Hills is neither a passionate documentation of verifiable social details, nor is it a clinical study of Jamaican working class life in the naturalistic tradition. Mais has written a complex but artistically defective novel, in which he explores with imaginative vigour and realistic candour the truths of human experience; in the work, he objectively records 'the hopes, fears and frustrations' of the invisible Jamaican people, 'who are naive and savage, and generous and cunning, and simple and sensitive and gross,' and 'tells of their loves, hates, vengeance, and of their laughter and tears.'[7]

The Hills opens with an impressive evocation of its setting and atmosphere, and straight away we begin to see how creatively Mais uses his material:

> The yard counted among its ramshackle structures an old shaking-down concrete nog building with the termite-ridden wood frame eating away until only a crustacean shell under the dirty white cracked and blistering paint remained.
>
> This building stood on the south side. A row of barrack-like shacks at back and another row of barrack-like shacks to the north, with the crazily-leaning fence out front, enclosed what was once a brick-paved courtyard in the middle of which there was an ancient circular cistern and above it a standpipe with a cock leaning all to one side and leaking continually with a weary trickle of water that was sometimes stronger than at others, depending on the pressure from the main outside.
>
> In the middle of the crazy front fence, on top of a dilapidated brick step that had belonged to the premises before the great earthquake, was a little paint-blistered, wry-hinged, buck-toothed, obscenely grinning, tin-patched, green-and-white gate.

> Near the cistern in the yard a gnarled ackee tree reached up scraggy, scarred, almost naked-branched to the anaemic-looking sky. A thrifty black-mango tree leaned over the southern half of the front fence, its branches lopped back every so often to keep it from overhanging the narrow sidewalk. A prickly lime tree struggled up from among the earthed-in, seamy, rotting bricks in the yard; it stood against the northern row of wooden shacks right outside the room where the three Sisters of Charity lived, and crooned and gossiped and cooked and sing-sang sad hymns of wailing the livelong day.
>
> (The Hills, p. 9)

On a descriptive level, this view of the yard, in which much of the action of the novel takes place, is sturdily concrete; analogically, much of the detail typifies the larger society that lies outside the immediate limits of the novel. But the passage contains considerably more than its sharp specificity and oppressive reality. Every object in the entire setting generates symbolic energy; collectively, they foreshadow the kind of experience the novel describes. The theme of entrapment which, as we have said, dominates the fiction, is hinted in the very contour of the yard, girdled by barrack-like shacks. The 'gnarled ackee tree' and the 'crustacean shell' prepare us for the stultification and emptiness found in the lives of the people in the yard, and the 'termite-ridden wood frame' images the insidious effects of poverty on their spiritual and moral nature. Within this description of dilapidation, deformity, and stagnation lies also a suggestion, implicit in the tree images, of natural energy, of a desperate struggle for survival in the face of overwhelming odds. And this too is a persistent theme in The Hills. The vital impulses of the yard-dwellers, their inarticulate longing to escape from their constriction into a larger world of social, economic, and spiritual freedom are held in check, much in the same way as the 'thrifty black-mango tree' is continually pruned to remain within the confines of the yard.

More fundamentally, though, this bleak introduction to the world of The Hills instantly disabuses the reader of the illusion which the title of the novel seems to encourage, and alerts him to the possibility of ironic dissonance. There can be no joy in this world and, as the narrative develops, Mais relentlessly piles up the evidence to consolidate this impression. But the further we look at the novel from the perspective of its title, the more dramatically complex and proliferating the irony becomes, and the more we begin to appreciate the imaginative depth of The Hills. The title of the novel is taken from a revival song based on Psalm 98, which enjoins the whole of creation to celebrate the glory of God. Verse 8 reads: 'Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together.' The hills in the Psalm may have reasons to rejoice in the dramatic presence of the Lord, but the hills of the novel, given the view they command, can hardly do so.

It is tempting to see the hills as a symbol of the dignity and freedom which the people in the yard aspire in vain to attain. But the way Mais places the hills on the outer perimeter of his world seems to imply that he conceives them as yet another form of enclosure.[7] Worse still, the hills can be made to take on an active malevolence. The scene in which Rema goes stark mad will help to make this point clearer. In her condition, the hills appear to Rema as aggressive, ominous, and grotesquely sinister:

> She raised her arms straight up above her head.
> 'And they were dancing all down the long valley . . . the hills . . . but you weren't there.'
> She suddenly turned, and threw her arms about him, knocking the spectacles off his face.
> 'Oh God!' she cried, 'you won't let them get me. They would trample me to death, you know? The hills.'
> 'The hills, yes honey, they won't ever get to hurt you.' He set his spectacles straight on his face again, with some difficulty, still holding on to her with one arm.
> 'So they were joyful so they were dancing. They come prancin' down from up yonder with a thunder-roll.'
> She laughed, and put her hands up to her face, pushing the wild hair out of her eyes.
> She said, looking at him earnestly: 'They were tramplin' everything down into the ground before them.'
>
> (The Hills, p. 207)

This demonic glee with which the hills seem to mock Rema relates to another kind of perversity that serves to frustrate the people in the yard. For Mais the inhabitants of the yard are not only the victims of social oppression; they are also at the mercy of a pitiless universe that looks upon human strivings with implacable indifference. The natural elements of wind, cloud, sky, sun, moon, and the stars, though impassive and neutral in their cosmic rhythm, seem to participate in the affairs of man with a caprice that swerves between sympathy and hostility. 'Chance' enters into this general philosophical conception of a mechanistic universe as a malignant force. 'That metaphor "the bludgeoning of chance," Mais wrote in an early article, 'has always captured my imagination. How I wish I could lift it from Henley. It has such an universal appeal, such an universal application.'[9] By the time Mais came to write The Hills, it would seem that the metaphor had grown sufficiently powerful in his imagination to inform his vision of the human condition: 'The trifling sprigs of chance confound our footsteps . . . the events that make tomorrow quit themselves today outside our ken . . .' (p. 242).

The scene in which Mais describes the burglary that lands Surjue in jail illustrates well the way the fitfulness of nature and the malignancy of chance are made to frustrate the character. The robbery is successfully committed under the cover of darkness. But just as Surjue and Flitters are about to make good their escape, their witless accomplice, 'the dàrk cloud,' drags away from 'its scattered waggontail of stars,' and the ensuing brightness reveals their presence to a policeman, who should not have been there, according to their calculation. The cop is the random element in their plan. At the end of the novel, Mais virtually duplicates the same pattern of events. A dark cloud covers the moon while Surjue climbs up the prison wall. As he nears the top, the seemingly sympathetic cloud recedes from the surface of the moon. At this very moment, Aaron Nickoll, the only guard who had not run to help extinguish the diversionary fire, suddenly jerks his head up in reaction to a savage wrench of pain from a rotten tooth, sees Surjue, and with his rifle brings him down. As Surjue falls to the ground, 'A scudding, shapeless mass of filmy clouds drew over the face of the moon.' The final view that Mais presents of Surjue is of a man crucified on the ground: 'He lay on his back, his arms flung wide, staring up at the silent unequivocal stars' (p. 288).

In both of these episodes, Mais evidently wants us to see Surjue as a victim of random forces over which he has no control, but which play a decisive role in his fate. To realize his intention, Mais grossly manipulates the circumstances. Contrivance in fiction is an intrinsic formal necessity. But when it violates our sense of probability, it becomes objectionable. The two incidents under scrutiny appear too overtly contrived. In his anxiety to achieve a tragic perspective, Mais deliberately distorts his experience of reality. In any case, it is neither the capriciousness of nature nor the malignancy of chance that, in the final analysis, foils Surjue. In the earlier episode, Surjue falls prey to human treachery and a temperamental flaw in his character. Of the probability of such an interpretation, Mais was not altogether unconscious; in fact, we take our cue from his ironic deflation of Surjue (see p. 28). Later in the novel, Mais revises his conception of Surjue in a manner that evokes a sympathetic response from the reader. At this stage, though, the author presents the character as a smalltime gambler, whose high opinion of his knowledge of race horses spills over into an egotistical cocksureness of his ability to judge people. But the truth is that Surjue knows as little of human nature as he does of horses -- probably less if we go by the personal disaster that results from his underestimation of Flitters. Early in the novel, Rema cautions Surjue to beware of Flitters; her intuition tells her that Flitters is as crafty as the folkloric character, Anancy. But, with characteristic bravado, Surjue brushes her aside, and assures her that he can handle Flitters: '"You don't have to worry about Flitters, see, I can take care of a dope like that without turning on my side"' (p. 30). The full irony of this boastful assurance comes to a bitter realization when Surjue is betrayed by his partner in crime, even as he acts as a decoy to allow him to slip away: 'It was a long time before he could make himself believe that Flitters had abandoned him here on the roof, and he must make his own get away as best as he could. His mind shied at the chill reality again and again, and he resolutely shut it away' (p. 120). Greed may have motivated Flitters to leave Surjue in the lurch, but Mais carefully leaves a trail of dramatic evidence that suggests that the betrayal is a psychological act of revenge for all the little indignities and humiliation that Flitters has had to endure at the hands of Surjue (see pp. 22-28, 82-85); it was his opportunity to deflate Surjue of his pretentious knowingness and the air of superiority and arrogance he has always assumed with him.

Mais does not linger upon the moral sordidness of Flitters's desertion, partly because the need does not arise, and partly because the arrest of Surjue, which he proceeds to describe, is more crucial to his dramatic design. Characteristically, Surjue pins his hopes of escape on a gamble that does not pay off: 'He counted on the chance that the cop would be watching the spot where he had been under cover, put his hand up and over and made sure of the ladder' (p. 120, emphasis mine). The sentence looks back to the intercalation at the beginning of Chapter 7: 'There were some who accounted the chance sure-footed, and added their bones to the bleached white bones on the beach' . . . (p. 63), and anticipates the one in which Surjue and Cubana assess their chances of a successful prison break: 'They stood by the window now, alert, waiting for the moment to come when they would make their gamble against odds'(p. 267). Again, in the final scene, Surjue is not so much the victim of an indifferent universe and the phenomenon of chance as he is of a social process of dehumanization personified in the figure of Nickoll. Nickoll represents the epitome of a social system that strips men of their essential humanity. The guard does not even recognize the prisoner; he merely sees 'a shadow against the wall . . . an instant glimpse . . . a dim outline' (p. 287). His reaction is automatic, reflexive: 'Without thinking he drew his rifle to him. His hand, of its own volition, jerked a cartridge into the chamber. The butt came up to his shoulder. Without even bothering to aim he pulled the trigger' (p. 287). The sharp, crisp sentences that Mais uses to describe the sequence of action that the character mindlessly goes through fully express his perception of the functional, mechanical man Nickoll has become, and by extension the barbarous nature of the society that conditions him.

A similar discrepancy between what Mais wishes to convey and what does come through in the process of fictional transformation can be seen in his attempts to persuade us that the people of The Hills are inclusively the blighted victims of socio-economic deprivation: '"What happens to people whose lives are constricted and dwarfed and girdled with poverty"' asks the Chaplain. His answer, '"moral deformity, degradation, disease"' (p. 197) carries the author's conviction behind it. The trouble with this deterministic view of the effects of poverty on the human personality, however, is that it does not exactly square with the direct experience of the novel.[10] This does not mean that we do not see the disease, decay, and deformity that Mais gives us in The Hills as the legacy of poverty. Indeed, we do. But at the same time, the verve and liveliness with which the people of the yard endure their dreadful condition, the courage and tenacity with which they cling to life, their refusal to succumb to despair, or even surrender to apathy and the kind of spiritual atrophy that usually sets in on people in their situation considerably undermine the force of any suggestion that they are determined by the quality of their environment.

Mais's philosophy should logically demoralize his characters, reduce them to mechanical puppets. But the fact that it does not, opens the way for the proposal that Mais does not apply the theory of dialectical materialism *de rigueur* simply because the premise on which it rests conflicts with his own experience of life and with his knowledge of the social correlates of his characters. To offer an explanation for the contradictions in The Hills does not justify or remove them. We therefore have to conclude that Mais does not manage to achieve the kind of artistic synthesis he speaks of in the capacity of a commentator on the art of fiction: 'The most precious gift to a writer of fiction is his ability to seize upon an idea, and fuse it into the essence of being, until, under his hand, it becomes living organic substance articulate of humanity.'[11] Ironically, though, Mais's failure to make the form of the novel conform to his intellectual conception of a determinate life helps to rescue the novel from the deadly sociological cul-de-sac in which so many naturalistic novels have become moribund. To put it this way is to argue that although Mais was convinced that economic miseries breed moral corruption, his application of the theory of social causality is not so uncompromising as to make him exclude from his fiction experiences which give human life its meaning and worth. Accordingly, we find beneath the squalor and violence of The Hills a core of humanity. The novel celebrates the values of generosity, selflessness, and compassion -- moral qualities which Mais associates with the common people, such as Ras, whose kindness springs from a genuine humanitarian impulse; as Rema, who offers to the child Tansy the love and affection she never receives from her natural parents; as Mas Mose, who gently soothes Rema in her madness. But it is Zephyr, the prostitute, that Mais endows with a consciousness of the naturalness of disinterested generosity: '"[I]n things like sickness an' trouble it's just natural for people to help one another, it seems to me"' (p. 122). Zephyr backs her words with an active charity that stems directly from her good nature and sympathetic emotions. When Bedosa dies, she hurries over to console Charlotta; when Rema goes into shock, she tends to her; and only she can penetrate the wall of silence that Euphemia builds around herself, and through empathy and compassion make the confused girl become aware of certain possibilities, even awakening in her a new sense of moral responsibility. Incidentally, too, it is in the mouth of Zephyr that Mais puts the philosophical core of the novel:

'"Life got a stick to beat us with -- every last, lonesome, sufferin' mother's son"' (p. 123).

It is not my intention to suggest that Mais romanticizes his peasants. Far from it. For if he shows that they can be impulsively generous and spontaneously compassionate, he does not hesitate to show us that they can be mean, vicious, and malicious, and as destructive in their hatred as they are savage in their vengeance. Living as closely as they do, and with the kind of socio-economic pressure that they face daily, Mais's people exist in a highly volatile state. Patience and tolerance quickly wear thin; emotional temperatures come to a rapid boil; and with no socially acceptable way to express the frustration, they erupt in violence or seek release in sex, drugs, and blind religious fervour. Even when Mais attempts to show the kind of communal feeling that can sometimes enter the yard, as in the 'big-fish fry' episode (pp. 38-56), the potentially explosive situation that involves Shag, Euphemia, and Bajun Man impinges on their consciousness. When Shag tells the story of Wallacy and the way he disposes of his woman for her infidelity, the subliminal tension breaks to the surface: 'When Shag finished telling the story nobody said anything, because Shag was always one for laughing and cracking jokes and merrying-up himself, and this story was not at all the kind of story they had ever heard him tell. So nobody said anything, and you could almost hear them drawing their breath and a couple of the women shuffled their feet a bit in the gravel, and nobody looked at Euphemia although everybody wanted to see how she was taking it' (p. 53).

It is a tribute to Mais that this seemingly casual story of Wallacy plays a more dramatic role in the structure of the novel than it appears at first glance. The fate of Susu ominously foreshadows the fate that awaits Euphemia. From this point, too, the narrative picks up speed, and in a series of violent catastrophes, Mais turns the world of The Hills into hell. Bedosa is struck down by a train; Flitters meets with an end that is probably commensurate with his treachery; Shag hacks Euphemia to death, and then drops down and dies; and Rema goes mad while Surjue languishes in prison.

The Hills closes with the successive deaths of Rema and Surjue, the two characters through whom Mais effects his most bitter social criticism. To begin with, the arrest of Surjue allows Mais to take his social protest to the penal institution. Mais's attack on the conditions in the Spanish Town prison has nothing to do with his own personal experience in jail, as it is generally held; it is logically responsive to the narrative. In Mais's social vision, prison is an extension and inevitable outcome of slum life: '"The population of our prisons is made up almost wholly of people who had no alternative but to commit these crimes for which they are punished, and what is more shocking still, they will be forced to commit them again and again, each time they are outside. For they have no other means of putting food in their hungry bellies, let alone all consideration of dignity and the free development of their personality"' (p. 239). So reasons the Chaplain, into whose mouth Mais puts his own deterministic views of crimes: 'As for our . . .

petty thieving if you will stop to consider the matter for a moment you will see for yourself that in that hard school in which we were reared in those generations during which we lived in slavery, and in the succeeding generations no less, the only way we could secure certain privileges for ourselves . . . was to steal.'[12]

It is not my purpose or my task to question the validity of Mais's contention here and in The Hills that necessity and self-preservation morally justify the poor to steal. My concern, instead, is with his failure to establish his social philosophy dramatically in The Hills. Mais seems to be asking us to take Surjue as an example of the sociological phenomenon he describes. But at no time in the novel does Mais give us the impression that Surjue turns to crime because of his destitution. The truth is that Mais characterizes Surjue, at least at the stage of the narrative where it matters, as bumptious and bombastic, a loafer more or less kept by his woman; and although through a change in the author's conception later in the novel the character comes to earn our retroactive sympathy when we are taken into his mind and shown his tender love for Rema, his sensitivity, and integrity, and the facade of toughness behind which he had sought to hide his true nature, the revision comes too late for us to invoke 'situational ethic' in defence of his criminal action.

It is not enough for a writer of fiction to possess a penetrating social insight into the conditions which turn normally decent people into criminals, nor to intimate that moral principles do not apply in the face of necessity. A novelist must not only create a social milieu that breeds crimes; he must also imagine a character who holds our sympathy, so that when the character lapses into crime, we judge not the act itself, but the context in which it takes place. Garth St. Omer, for example, shows us in the story, 'Syrop,' that Anne has no choice but to turn to prostitution in order to survive. Surjue too may not have had any other choice in the course of action he takes. But it is the characterization of the figures that makes all the difference in our response. Anne is a victim of an uncongenial environment; Surjue is a victim of his creator.

But if Mais fails to unify the forces of theme, character, and moral concern, as Ian Watt in The Rise of the Novel (1957) claims carefully written fiction should do, his ideas on the deterministic effects of poverty are as genuine as his criticism of the dehumanization process that occurs in prison: 'They make animals without hope of the men who pass through here' (p. 211). For Mais, as for Dickens, prison symbolizes defeat, misery, and degradation, the ultimate in the annihilation of the human spirit:

> Walls, walls, and all that passed between them . . . a man unmanned, un-countenanced, given over to the naked stare of self-pity . . . society, and the cankering, unyielding sore . . . enclosed within these walls a man was shut from light, like a seed struggling toward the sunlight from between damp stones . . . shut away like this a man lost his manhood and became a cypher, and lost his spirit and became insensible stone . . . shut in like this, with the rats scampering in the ceiling, and the stale smell of human waste and offal, and the vultures circling eternally in the sky, a man became at last lost to himself utterly and to the world . . . shut away a man like this and all you had was his skin -- stretched tightly against his body that knew the pang and torture and bitterness and degradation of whip and bludgeon and

> ankle-chain, and his shame, and the shame of others with him, all . . . all of the man that you shut in here was one with the bricks that went into the hideous walls, never to come out again, like the bricks that held together the hideous cells in darkness, and the mould that grew and ripened on the damp and reeking walls.
>
> All of the men enclosed within these deadening walls, within this sightless, unfeeling darkness stayed here with the generations of lost men that were brought here damned to insensible negation out of sight of the world . . . the lost generations came here, were taken up, caught up, lost without memory of the living world . . . lost without end in darkness, the spiritless, succeeding generations upon generations, the murderers and rapers of young girls, the spoilers of others, the arsonists, the cut-throats, their manhood slowly squeezed from them, to be drunk up at last by the screaming murderous walls.
>
> (The Hills, pp. 208-209)

Barrie Davis comments relevantly on this passage: 'The prison itself is no longer a place, but a universal confine, an inexorable process of abnegation where men walk upright not because they are alive, but because it is habitual and they earn the contempt of vultures.'[13]

The full horror of imprisonment, as it is shown in The Hills, however, is not to be found in the dank concrete walls, the excretory stenches, and the cruel beatings which the prisoners receive from sadistic jailors; rather, it comes to us through the sufferings of Rema, who depends so much on Surjue for stability, love, and companionship that when he goes to prison, and she is not allowed to visit or communicate with him, she loses her hold on life and simply disintegrates. What makes Rema an effective figure of embodied social protest is the way Mais presents her. We see Rema, not as a raving maniac, but as a sad and helpless woman. Mais shows through her insanity what happens when society cruelly withholds love from a woman who needs it. In her death, Mais reveals a sphere of values which this very society could never hope to achieve: 'There is in this country, alas, a moated-tower of mediocrity, close and unassailable, and it holds such sway, it has acquired such a body of mediocre opinion about it that it is useless to try to make a dent in its smugness and its exclusiveness and its indifference to anything that does not come entirely within its limited scope and compass and influence.'[14]

The Hills Were Joyful Together is not a difficult novel to read, understand, and interpret in the way Harris's The Waiting Room (1967) is, for example. Yet, it is less easy to write a coherent analysis of it, and this is mainly because the work does not lend itself readily to an intensive organic approach. There are two reasons for this. First, Mais does not provide us with a main character around whom the action revolves. Surjue comes close to serving in this capacity, but he is not the pivotal centre to the extent that Bra' Man and Jake are, respectively, in Brother Man and Black Lightning. If there is a protagonist in The Hills, it is the yard community, and even here, interaction is tenuous. People meet and clash, and then sink back into their individual existence. There is not a complex web of inter-relationships in which lives touch and become inextricably bound up. Mais is evidently more interested in the human society, the presentation of what Henry James calls 'felt life,' than in the individual consciousness, and it is perhaps for this reason that the characterization in the novel seems thin. Mais takes a consistently external view of his characters and does not develop them fully as social and moral beings. It remains to be said that although Mais does not create 'round' characters, in the Forsterian sense of the word, he sharply individualizes them, and does show in his presentation of Euphemia, Manny, and Surjue that he understands and can register subtlety and complexity in human nature.

The second difficulty that stands in the way of a logical discussion of The Hills is the nature of its organization. The novel is loose and episodic, on the verge of formlessness. In the traditional sense of the word, the novel has no structure. The action does not rise steadily to a definite climax and culminates in an inevitable catastrophe. Such neatness in the disposition of his material Mais apparently feels can do no justice to his vision of life which he sees as devoid of shape or form. In his desire to recreate life in all its unpredictable entrances and exits, Mais weaves a story around each set of characters, and then develops each plot simultaneously. Such a technique makes for verisimilitude, but it does so at the expense of the organic integrity of the novel. If this is a formal weakness of The Hills, it is one that the novel survives. The Hills fails as an artistic endeavour because Mais does not reconcile his metaphysical and social philosophies with his knowledge and experience of life.

The Hills Were Joyful Together is the first novel Mais wrote, and it is on this work that his popularity, if not his artistic reputation, rests. Similarly, The Children of Sisyphus (1964) is Patterson's first work of fiction, and it is the novel that comes to mind when his name is mentioned, although his other two novels, An Absence of Ruins (1966) and Die the Long Day (1972) are more imaginative and more critically challenging. There is, however, a more obvious similarity that links the two Jamaican novelists. Mais's declared purpose in The Hills is what Patterson achieves in The Children. The novel gives a grim picture of human destitution scarcely conceivable in its wretchedness. The setting is the Dungle, a refuse dump in the slums of West Kingston. The poverty here is indescribable. Through the dreary consciousness of the garbagemen, as they mechanically and despairingly make their way to the Dungle with their precious cargo of waste, Patterson evokes a world that approaches the horror of a nightmare:

> On the left side of the road would be the miserable little huts of Back-O-Wall, slutty and grimy with the tiny little peep-holes beneath the old zinc ceilings: Through them half-naked children too hungry to play, and shrivelled, atrophic old men with their black gums, too weak to move, would be peering. And there would be the younger ones, seedy and slow with long hands and drooping shoulders lounging on the sidewalk, glaring up at them from beneath their foreheads, with the whitish yellow of their eyes, all waiting, waiting for the night to fall . . . And on the left were shacks: dreadful, nasty little structures -- a cluster of cardboard, barrel sides, old cod-fish boxes, flattened tar drums and timber scraps. A few, the more luxurious, consisted of the carcasses of old cars.
>
> (The Children, pp. 22-3)

There is no exaggeration or distortion for effect in this description. It is starkly realistic, perhaps even crude in its literal transcription of the observable sordid details of the external world. But it is in this very authenticity of objective reality that Patterson finds the appropriate symbol for his presentation of societal indifference and callousness. The Dungle is not only a place of garbage and sewage disposal; it is also, as Patterson perceives it, the murky refuge of the destitute and the helpless, whom society abandons with as much concern as it shows for the refuse it dumps.

Life in the Dungle is a deadly struggle for survival. Nowhere in the novel is this more evident than in the bizarre scene in which Patterson describes the mayhem that breaks loose among the ragged slum-dwellers as they descend upon the garbage like a pack of hungry wolves upon a carcass:

> It was a free-for-all. A mad, raging, screaming, laughing, angry, hungry scramble. A wolf-pack at war. Men and women and children and beasts all joined in the snatching and grabbing and biting one another for any new prize they found in the garbage. Old Cassandra screamed with delight as a rotten bit of cod-fish fell upon her face. A youth plucked the beard of another and kicked him in the pit of his stomach for snatching his piece of bread and stuffing it down before he had time to get it back. 'Long-mouth Clara,' too weak with consumption to enter the scramble, looked hungrily at the luscious piece of disinfected mackerel that a ragged old beard held and, catching his eyes for a moment, she pointed suggestively to the clump of sargasso beside the beach.
>
> (The Children, p. 25)

The jungle law of survival operates even with nature: only the parasitic 'doders,' that suck the life from the thorny bushes and stunted shrubs, thrive.

Patterson does not confine his description of the social condition that prevails in West Kingston to the Dungle. As the novel progresses, large areas of contemporary urban Jamaica, where the poverty is even more depressing, are included. But it is necessary to point out at once, if we hope to interpret The Children of Sisyphus correctly, that although Patterson wants to expose the dreadful poverty of the working class in Jamaica, it is not his main purpose in the novel. The local situation merely serves as a scaffold on which he hangs his belief in the absurdity of the human condition.

As both the title and the epigraph indicate, Patterson draws his creative inspiration from Camus, and uses The Myth of Sisyphus as the doctrinal foundation for his novel. Clearly, in this explicit attempt to relate the reality of the Jamaican social scene to the absurdity of a mythological experience, Patterson wants to give historical depth and metaphysical resonance to issues which are primarily sociological in nature. There is of course nothing wrong in an author seeking to ennoble his social material through symbol and myth. James Joyce has done it brilliantly, even if self-consciously, in Ulysses (1922). But this tendency to interpret the texture and quality of social life mythopoeically sometimes creates more literary problems than it solves, and this seems to be the case with Patterson. The desire to encapsulate human experience in an imported philosophical abstraction not only stultifies the creative process; it also undermines the intimacy and concreteness of the fictional exploration, and attenuates its dramatic power. The change of the title from The Children of Sisyphus to Dinah in the Pyramid edition may perhaps lie behind a wish to silence the philosophical reverberations that the novel stirs in the imagination under its original title. Whatever the reason for the change, it serves to direct our attention to an aspect of the novel that is usually neglected in discussions of it.

The main character in The Children is Dinah, a prostitute, who, at the beginning of the novel, is determined to break away from her cloacal existence in the Dungle. 'They said if you lived in the Dungle long enough there wouldn't be any ambition left in you' (p. 28). Dinah proves to be the exception. The one characteristic that distinguishes her from the rest of the slum-dwellers is her desire to lead a decent, human life, and the moral and physical courage to pursue her dream: '"I always wan' fe live in a room wid good solid wall round me an' a floor under me foot an' ceilin' over me 'ead. Ah always wan' fe eat good good food like wha' ah see in de picture advertisement. I wan' fe give up me life of whoredom an' live like normal woman"' (p. 38).

Dinah begins her revolt against poverty and squalor and the drabness of her life with a severe handicap. As a woman from the Dungle, she is a pariah, a social outcast, and she carries this stigma with her wherever she goes. Moreover, Dinah has neither the education nor the experience to cope with the outside world which confuses and bewilders her. It is not surprising that she winds up in Jones Town, another slum, even worse than the one from which she has just made her escape:

> She had never seen poverty quite like this before. Where she came from there was complete poverty, and so there was no poverty. For in the Dungle poverty was a way of life which she neither hated nor loved but which seemed to have a frightening compulsion about it. Here, however, it was different. They might have come from the country; they might have had a good job once; when they were young they might well have got good pickings while they whored. But they had all fallen. They were all little pieces of garbage thrown aside by

> their worlds. In the Dungle you could be easy, you could be patient, you could even be happy in your complete loss of hope. Unless you were a Rastafarian there was nothing to look forward to except poverty. Here they were striving. They were rolling on their bellies and their heads were buried in the dust. But they were conscious of where their bellies were and she knew they constantly felt the dust around them. She felt, too, the strange anger that came from them. Yet she could see that even in their anger they were failing. They could only curse themselves. But they knew it wasn't real. Always they laughed at themselves as they cursed themselves.
>
> (The Children, p. 98)

But Dinah is as much a victim of Patterson as she is of her Dungle heritage. The author deprives the character of an autonomy of existence. Increasingly, as the novel progresses, Patterson manipulates Dinah into situations that are overtly contrived to grind his axe of social criticism. Too often we see her in the role of a socially conscious observer, acute and aware, and not enough as an individual in the throes of despair. A good illustration of this deflection in our perspective on Dinah can be seen in her orderly reflection on the quality of life in Trench Town:

> It was another world inside there hedged in by the cacti. It had a character different, too, from the type she now experienced in Jones Town. The people all seemed the same. They all had the same hemmed-in look on their faces, as if they had never gone outside on the road before. They all seemed prisoners of the hoary cacti. They seemed to linger and crawl and slave for the cacti. The thick, flat, heavy green cacti, with the grey streaks and the tall spikes, were like living bludgeons: greedy, green and greedy for their lives. There was a strange silence in the place. Even the noises that the hungry babies made, the whimpering of the old women, the knock of the dominoes on the raw wooden tables in the little arid openings that the men made as they gambled, even the sounds that the children made as they played without laughter, they all added to the silence rather than detracted from it. There was always a hush, always a pressing, eerie, squalid hush

> forced down by the bludgeoning cacti, by the little arid, dusty patches, by the complexity of the narrow, crooked pathways which lost themselves in an unending maze.
>
> (The Children, p. 147)

Strange as it may seem, this whole passage is refracted through a deeply troubled mind. Social realism seems to be of greater urgency to Patterson than the need to render the character in a psychologically plausible manner.

Equally disconcerting is the obtrusive manner in which Patterson uses Dinah to prove his philosophy of existential absurdity. The character is denied any imaginative life and freedom. She exists solely as a symbol of the futility of human endeavour. Patterson sees her quest for dignity as hopeless as the impossible task which the gods assign to Sisyphus, and her eventual return to her origin as inevitable as the downward roll of the heavy stone her archetype takes up the hill. All of Dinah's efforts to erase the Dungle from her consciousness only carry her irresistibly toward the place of her birth: '"Ah running from it.Ah try hard as ah can. But it not outside o' me. It inside. It drawin' me back. Ah don' wan' to go back but it pulling me hard-hard"' (p. 155). Even at the end of the novel, when Dinah manages to achieve a measure of peace and seems on the verge of realizing her dream through marriage and emigration, her premonition of disaster turns her dream into a nightmare. A frenzied religious assembly viciously tears her to pieces when the circumstantial evidence points to her as the murderess of the 'Shepherd,' the man she is about to marry. Rescued by Sammy, the garbage man, before the mob could mangle her to death, Dinah frantically makes for the Dungle as if in response to an imperious call from the depth of her soul: 'She had to get back. She knew she had to get back. There was no longer pain, for there was too much for her to feel. The life was almost gone. But she knew she had to be back there in the Dungle. She knew she had to taste the filth again. She knew he would be there waiting for her' (pp. 196-97). And she does with her last breath, even as the Dungle reclaims her.

Co-extensive with the personal story of Dinah is the collective story of the Rastafarians. The Dungle is their refuge, at least temporarily, until they leave for Ethiopia, their spiritual and emotional home. Meanwhile, they endure their hardships with forbearance,dignity, and hope. Unlike Dinah, they do not try to enter the outside world: they reject it with as much scorn as it rejects them. But they too fail to realize their dream. While they are celebrating their imminent departure for the promised land, news of the failure of their delegation to negotiate with the Emperor for their repatriation reach them: '"It say dat de whole delegation was a flop. Dat de only person they manage to see in Ethiopia was some subordinate official in de public-relations department. Nobody in Ethiopia seem to tek dem seriously. Dat las' letter dat they write 'bout seeing de Emperor was jus' a damn' lie"' (pp. 198-99). But Patterson takes them seriously; and although he recognizes the unreality of their expectations, he does not treat them derisively, as J.B. Emtage does in Brown Sugar (1966); he presents their alienation, which he sees as a direct consequence of socio-economic oppression, with sympathetic understanding.

In realistic prose fiction, motivation precedes and explains action, and there is a clear, causal relationship in the sequence of events. But because The Children goes beyond simple social realism, and seeks to communicate a vision of the futility of human struggle in an absurd world, logic and reason do not prevail. Dinah cannot understand, any more than the reader does, the forces which mesmerically draw her back to the Dungle. Through the consciousness of Rachel, the Cassandra of the Dungle, Patterson lets us know that escape from the stranglehold of the Dungle is simply impossible: 'Nobody can leave the Dungle for good. Once yu born in it the world was the Dungle. The Dungle was the world. You were condemned to roam and wander freely there. But you couldn't leave. That for certain' (pp. 181-82). But if, in the fate that finally overtakes Dinah, Patterson gives dramatic expression to his belief in the inevitability of failure in a senseless world, he also sees in her attempts to overcome her destiny a certain nobility. Only to the extent that Dinah challenges an absurd world to yield to her quest for personal fulfilment, does Patterson envisage her as a figure of absurdity.

Dinah, if it needs to be said, is no Sisyphus. Our admiration for her comes only from her raw courage and grim resolve to escape her heritage of filth and misery, not from a philosophical transcendence of her situation through scorn and contempt, as we find in the case of the legendary figure. In The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus locates the heroism of Sisyphus in his 'dogged revolt against his condition, perseverance in an effort considered sterile,' and in his conscious realization of the uselessness of his task: 'Sisyphus, proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn' (Myth, p. 109). Patterson endows Dinah with no such consciousness, but he stays close to Camus in other respects. Through Brother Solomon, the Rastafarian leader, whom Ramchand identifies as the authoritative character in the novel, Patterson echoes Camus on the comedy that lies at the heart of human experience:

> 'Everywhere, in everything, there is the comedy you see before you now, Brother. You eat to satisfy your hunger only that you can get hungry again, Brother. You roll upon your naked woman and satisfy your lust only that you can come again to her. You fool yourself into believing that deep down in you there is a hidden god, something real, something meaningful. You search and search. You're on the point of reaching, or you think you are. Then, crash! The mirage vanish and you're all alone in the wild and barren desert. This is the greatest comedy, Brother. At least you satisfy your hunger in your craving to be hungry again; at least there is some satisfaction as you fall off the belly of your woman, you have at least the knowledge that you believe you felt something. But with your inner striving, Brother, there is the complete comedy, for when the mirage vanish you have not just the agony of your own thirst still unquenched but the added agony of knowing that the mirage was always unreal. Hear me, Brother, to seek after God, to seek for some meaning, some essence, is unreality twice times over.'
>
> (The Children, p. 202)

In the preceding paragraphs, Brother Solomon explains to Brothers Simon, John and Ezekiel that he had purposely kept the failure of the mission to Ethiopia from the Brethren, and in his deception he has given them hope and happiness, and imaginative release from their painful consciousness of the brutality of their wretched existence. For the moment at least, they are able to cheat 'the dreary circle' of their meaningless struggle. But it is 'only the moment that counts' in the endless 'cosmic repetition' of the illusion and disillusion that constitute the essence of their fantastic lives.

On a more conscious artistic level, Patterson tries to express his vision of the futility of human endeavour in a meaningless world through the dramatic use of literary symbolism. The Dungle is, of course, the most obvious: it is a vast symbol of demoralization, although it never loses its existential integrity as a tangible experience. More in the background is the sea that reverberates against the dramatic action of the novel, but invariably it comes to lodge in the distracted consciousness of Brother Solomon as he contemplates the purposelessness that characterizes the human condition: 'He could hear it coming forward -- black sea, wide sea, endless, remote and haunting sea; he could hear it going backward; he could hear it coming forward, he could hear it going backward. Forward, backward; forward, backward; forward, forward, and back and back again . . .' (p. 120). Similarly, the casual mention of the 'flags of the great Emperor . . . rising every now and then in the wake of the evening breeze, then falling limply, drooped, the little flags of glory' (p. 42) early in the novel, acquires thematic significance later on. At first glance, the behaviour of the banners in the wayward wind appears to be no more than an incidental atmospheric detail. But as the drama of hopelessness and despair unfolds, the image of 'rise and fall' returns to haunt the imagination with the force of a proleptic symbol. Even the rhythm of the sentence and the not too subtle contempt in the 'little flags of glory' foreshadow the collapse of Rasta hope for entry into the Kingdom of the Emperor.

The Children of Sisyphus is a youthful work, written when Patterson was in his early twenties, and at a time when he was doing research for his doctoral dissertation, later to be published as The Sociology of Slavery (1967). Both of these facts significantly affect the book: as an apprentice novel, The Children suffers from such basic artistic weaknesses as a fragmentation in structure, characters who lack human density and autonomy, a kind of intellectual self-consciousness that manifests itself in a certain stiffness in style, and a pervasive sense of contrivance that leaves the reader with the impression that the book is not a direct recreation of life but an abstraction of it. As an outgrowth of a sociological research, it relies too much for its appeal on 'documentary material,' and too little on imaginative transmutation. It is the milieu, and not the people in it, that concerns Patterson. It is this particular flaw that distinguishes The Children of Sisyphus from another apprentice novel, Miguel Street (1959) by V.S. Naipaul. In this novel, there is even less formal cohesiveness and character development than in The Children, but where Patterson depends on the oppressiveness of social reality to reveal the quality of human life, Naipaul allows us to infer the nature of his fictional environment from the pervasive sense of futility and emptiness that inform the lives of all his characters. Behind their easy laughter and the triteness of their talk, which are self-protective, Naipaul discloses a human world of despair, frustration and unfulfilled dreams, all of which are directly attributable to socio-economic deprivation. Miguel Street is a far more subtle interpretation of social reality and a much more penetrative exploration of the human condition than The Children of Sisyphus.

It is true that the picture that Naipaul gives us in Miguel Street is one of futility and defeat, but there is no cynicism in the presentation. The Children of Sisyphus, on the other hand, is a work of absolute negation. Patterson allows no perspective to arise from his novel that holds any redemptive possibility in an absurd world, and in this regard the young West Indian writer may be said to take his philosophical pessimism even further than his French mentor. A comparison of the endings of The Children of Sisyphus and The Myth of Sisyphus will help to make this observation clearer. The West Indian novel closes with the death of Brother Solomon:

> He looked up at the sky. He could hold himself back no longer. He burst out laughing. It was a deep, wild, soul-consuming laugh. It mocked the shanties and hovels in front of him. It derided the many mounds of filth. Far, far into the night it could be heard. Even the sea could not escape it. It reached out for the very sky, so vast, so dark, so stupid, it jeered and jeered and jeered.
>
> He was convulsed. His eyes were wet and his throat swelled beneath the rope with his mocking spasm. He kicked the chair from beneath his feet. The rope

> tightened. The laughter gurgled up. His tongue pitched out and his eyes mocked the vast blue void with a wild, bulging, fantastic stare.
>
> (The Children, pp. 205-6)

Camus concludes his book with the triumph of Sisyphus:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He, too, concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself towards the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy.
>
> (The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 111)

Neither Brother Solomon nor Sisyphus seems to have any illusion about the absurdity of the human condition. But whereas Patterson's hero finds no reason to live, Camus asks us to imagine Sisyphus as 'happy' in his defiance and scorn of the gods, and in his recognition of his sterile and futile task. For Camus, it would seem, man derives a measure of dignity only if he sternly confronts reality in all its senselessness, while for Patterson, suicide is the only logical answer to a life of meaninglessness.

With the novels of Mendes (Black Fauns), James (Minty Alley), Mais (The Hills Were Joyful Together), and Naipaul (Miguel Street), not to mention several other early novels, including De Lisser's Jane's Career (1913), Selvon's A Brighter Sun (1952), Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1953) and Season of Adventure (1960), that deal less directly with the theme of socio-economic repression, it is not surprising that the reception of The Children of Sisyphus has been anything but warm, despite its realistic presentation of ineffable squalor and misery. A good deal of this general coolness has to do with the staleness of the theme itself, and although Patterson adds a new dimension to it by realigning a realistic narrative of modern Jamaica to a classical myth in order to emphasize the timelessness of his philosophy of existential absurdity, The Children of Sisyphus remains too firmly in the grip of doctrine. Not even the brilliant evocation of atmosphere, the quick pace, and archetypal pattern can preserve The Children of Sisyphus from the attrition of time. Still, the novel remains the most powerful social document yet to appear in West Indian fiction.

The Children of Sisyphus is not the only West Indian novel that will eventually become a casualty of time; it is a fate that awaits, and has already overtaken, many similar works which make objective naturalism their main concern. Marjorie Boulton quite rightly notes that anachronism is a danger that the social novel has to face: 'A highly topical novel has a great immediate advantage but seldom lasts longer than the evil it sought to expose.'[15] The social evils which the novels in this chapter seek to expose are far from being solved: social and economic deprivation among the West Indian masses is probably the only real certainty in an area where everything else is unstable. Still, the closeness with which these novels try to approximate external reality has come in for much criticism. Strictures are not unjustified, although in all fairness to the authors, their works do have 'a fairly broad and compassionate humanity and pay attention to the novel as a work of art.'[16] It is perhaps of little comfort to note that not one of the authors studied attempts to offer any solution to the problems he raises in his work. I should now like to turn my attention to the novels of some writers who do just this.

CHAPTER II

The Search for Social Redemption

Fairly early in A Quality of Violence (1959), Andrew Salkey allows Dada Johnson, an obeah man and confidence trickster, to explain to the skeptical Brother Parkin the reason for the popularity of his 'pocomania cult':

> 'I give those people plenty to believe in. I give them a cause to have a faith. I know that you think it just a lot of foolishness and all that. But, you have other things to hold on to. Those people you hear outside depend on me and what I can give them. I telling you that, now. I am not just one day of the week to them. I am all seven -- morning, noon, and night. It can't matter if I am a rass or not, Brother Parkin; because I know that that is what you thinking, right now. It can't matter, at all. And you know why? Because I not really causing them any harm. All I do that is bad, is collect a little "dues" off them, and that is my living. And for that collection, I give them hope and faith. I give them what big decorated church door can't satisfy, no how.'
>
> (A Quality of Violence, pp. 47-8)

A little later in the novel, as Marshall and Brother Parkin watch the elaborate 'rain dance' ceremony Dada and his deputy perform to end the long spell of dry season, Marshall cynically asks the purpose 'behind all this witch-wonder business.' Brother Parkin replies in a way that does not discredit his critical intelligence:

> 'You ask if there's a point to all this?' Brother Parkin chuckled. 'Of course, there is a point. If you want to find out, talk with any of them and they'll tell you that Dada Johnson is giving them what the Church can't. They'll tell you that he

> gives them courage and consolation, hope and good advice. They'll even tell you that he gives them a life to believe in and cherish.'
>
> (A Quality of Violence, p. 58)

Marshall is appropriately confused by the ambivalence in Parkin's answer: '"I don't understan' you at all, Brother Parkin. You talkin' like there's something sensible about the business. You talkin', again, like there's something crafty and nasty attached to it. You talkin' the both ways at one and the same time. Which way you want me to take it? Which way is the real way?"' (p. 59). But as Marshall continues to witness the bizarre ritual of frenzied dance, blood sacrifice and merciless whipping, and the loss of consciousness as the worshippers gyrate and grunt in sympathy with Dada and his deputy, he is forced to conclude: '"They must and bound to have a great emptiness, somewhere in their lives, that gnawing at them and begging for plenty-plenty satisfaction. I wonder is what cause this emptiness"' (p. 59).

Salkey leaves us in no doubt as to the cause of this void in the lives of these people. Nor does he make little of the therapeutic value of the particular form of their religion. But A Quality of Violence is not a work that attempts to offer a way of relief for a painful existence. Social redemption occupies only a peripheral place in the novel, which has no specific social theme, at least not an abstractable one. Salkey is more interested in the creation of a situation in which atavistic violence results when people lose all sense of moral and human values and seek to release their frustration in any way possible. This is made especially clear towards the end of the novel when a community of normally decent folk first complacently watches Mother Johnson nearly hang Brother Parkin, and then, when it becomes known that it is really Ma Johnson who is responsible for the death of the child, Doris, frantically turns on the woman and stones her to death.

Dada Johnson may be the most spectacular character in the book, but it is on Ma Johnson that Stalkey trains his artistic focus, and in her creation achieves a triumph that he has yet to equal. But however indelible the impression Ma Johnson makes in her scornful defiance of the blood-thirsty mob and in the heroic stature she approaches as she relaxes and waits for her 'sacrifice' to begin, it is the spectacle of human lust for violence that occurs on the hillside in a remote, austere rural area in Jamaica during a period of intense drought that stays with us and reminds us of an even greater tragedy of spiritual aridity that took place two thousand years ago: 'Drought first began on Calvary' (p. 19).

If escape from socio-economic pressure is only a subsidiary concern in the total aesthetic pattern of A Quality of Violence, it is central to Sylvia Wynter's The Hills of Hebron (1962), a novel that has much in common with the earlier work. Essentially, The Hills of Hebron deals with the hope of one man, Moses Barton, to ameliorate the sufferings of his people. Under the delusion that he is the Son of a Black God, Moses announces that, in a mystical communion with his Father, he was directed to lead the people from the bondage of poverty. When his first attempt to transport them up to heaven ends in disaster, Moses bounces back with the idea to create an earthly paradise 'where they would all be landowners, eating suckling pigs roasted with yams' (p. 152). Accordingly, Moses gathers up his faithful followers and withdraws from Cockpit Centre (the Babylon of the Bible or Egypt perhaps) into the hills where he founds the community of Hebron. Hebron, it is needless to say, hardly fits in with our idea of a land of 'milk and honey.' In fact, the people could scarcely scratch out a marginal existence. But this, of course, is in keeping with the novelist's parodistic intention.

Moses's reign over Hebron lasts only a brief spell. While on a visit to Cockpit Centre in search of relief, Moses becomes disturbed at the enthusiastic response of a crowd to a labour leader. Moses sees the man as a possible threat to his community, especially when the politician advises the people not to place any faith in an unseen God, who, if he does exist, seems totally oblivious of their servitude; he urges them to take matters in their own hands and force their oppressors through strike action to accede to their demands for better working conditions and pay. Fearful that his followers may defect, Moses hastily returns to Hebron, deeply troubled by his experience. To preserve his community, which he fears is in danger of breaking up, Moses resorts to a desperate measure: he orders his own crucifixion.

Miss Wynter is appropriately ambiguous in her attitude to Moses. On the one hand, Miss Wynter shows no contempt for Moses; on the other, she is careful to place him in proper perspective.

We see Moses as a charlatan who, like Dada Johnson, uses his position of trust to gratify his sexual appetite. In the crucifixion scene, Miss Wynter makes the character appear utterly ridiculous as he pathetically pleads in a feeble voice to be taken down from the cross: '"Loose me. I don't want to die. Loose me, loose me!"' (p. 246). Nonetheless, Miss Wynter does take Moses's idea of a redemptive community seriously. In his own small way, Moses has tried to restore, to use Lamming's words in another context, 'the West Indian peasant to his true and original status';[1] he has given the cultists self-respect and a sense of purpose in life. Miss Wynter, however, does not see eye to eye with her character on the solution to the problem of socio-economic oppression. She believes, and quite rightly so, that the ultimate answer lies not in withdrawal but in social and economic justice -- a redistribution of wealth. In a strident denunciation of the colonial mentality of the young ambitious political students, Miss Wynter clarifies her position: 'They never discussed how they would grapple with the problems of the future, how they would feed the hungry, provide jobs for the jobless, wipe out the three hundred years of malnutrition and mental atrophy that was the legacy of colonial rule' (p. 260).

The supreme sacrifice Moses made to guarantee the survival of Hebron paradoxically contains the germ of its destruction. Moses was the source of inspiration; he was the centre of gravity; on him the Hebronites had come to rely implicitly for guidance and direction. He gave them hope. Without him to shape their destiny, they became disorganized, dissociative, and stagnant: 'The life led by the New Believers after his death was an epilogue, a ritual dance, ossified by repetition now that its original impulse had been forgotten' (p. 248).

If the death of Moses constitutes the epilogue to Hebron, it forms the prologue to The Hills of Hebron. Miss Wynter opens her novel at a critical moment in the history of Hebron, twenty years after the death of its founder, and at a time when the community is faced with virtual starvation as it buckles under the onslaught of a seemingly endless drought. Here in this novel, as in A Quality of Violence, the wasteland motif is quite deliberate and equally functional. The drought coincides with, and is made to reflect, the spiritual barrenness of the people.

The situation at the beginning of The Hills of Hebron bristles with dramatic possibilities, which Miss Wynter exploits to the maximum. The prolonged dry season has exacerbated the condition of inertia which has permanently set in in Hebron since Moses died. The people grow increasingly discontented with their way of life, and there is talk of abandoning the settlement. But it is not the excessive heat that creates the crisis in Hebron. Miss Wynter locates the cause in the human community itself. Miss Gatha, widow of Moses, has long had her eye on the Eldership of Hebron, which she eventually wrests from Obadiah in a brutal process that ruins Obadiah and his wife, Rose, and throws the whole community in chaos and confusion. Ironically, Miss Gatha has no love for

Hebron, only calcified scorn and contempt, not unlike the emotion Ma Johnson feels for the very people she pretends to care for: '"Stupid, rass eyes! Those were the eyes that killed Dada! Greedy eyes! Eyes that were begging for a leader, begging for a faith, begging for a place on the land"' (A Quality of Violence, p. 116). Miss Gatha cannot forget that it was for Hebron that Moses had made her endure humiliation, neglect, and deprivation; she can never forgive him for his abdication of his family responsibility and his greed for glory. The fact that Moses had placed the welfare of the community before her and her son still rankles in her breast. Years of resentment have atrophied all generous impulses in Miss Gatha, and have made her mean, bitter, and vindictive. The attainment of the Leadership of Hebron would be her supreme revenge on the New Believers, who ignore and make fun of her son because of his clubfoot, and on Moses, who decreed that the appointment to the Eldership of Hebron should be meritorious, when he discovered that Isaac was physically defective.

Miss Gatha has a tall score to settle with Hebron, and she wastes no time in doing so. She stirs the men and women into action with the stinging lash of her tongue. She makes them wince, cringe, crawl, and grovel before her for the food and water she grudgingly gives them. But in spite of her contemptuous indifference to Hebron, Miss Gatha demonstrates in her administration a capability that indicates that Miss Wynter does not altogether withhold her artistic sympathy from her. Unlike Moses, whose idea of a redemptive community was idealistic, Miss Gatha envisages a practically viable one. The people, who have grown lazy and lackadaisical under the relaxed regimes of Moses and Obadiah, are now rudely shaken out of their lethargy and are given responsible duties. Miss Gatha suggests specific means to cope with the drought, and proposes measures to prevent the recurrence of a similar crisis. Her actions, however, are not motivated by any deep concern for human suffering, but are generated by self-interest. To fulfil her ambition, Hebron must live, and Miss Gatha makes sure that it does so on her terms.

The instinct for survival is strong in the Hebronites, a capacity that Miss Wynter relates to their heritage of slavery: 'Some weight of memory in their blood carried the ghosts of dark millions who had perished, coffined in the holds of ships, so that some could live to breed more slaves; and they, after their freedom had been won, survived the rootless years. They survived the loss of gods and devils that were their own, of familiar trees and hills and huts and spears and cooking pots of their own land in which to see some image of themselves' (pp. 58-9). But Miss Wynter does not allow her emotion to blind her to the real truth. She is also aware that this stubborn will to live manifests itself in the New Believers in a shameless submission to the despotism of Miss Gatha, in their timid surrender to abuse and indignity, and in their complete betrayal of Obadiah. In their concern for the ritual of living, the Hebronites recoil from the former Elder, whose years of sacrifice and service they easily forget. Again, in a passage that clearly reveals the extent to which Miss Wynter fails to achieve proper aesthetic distance from her novel, the author intrudes in her own voice to condemn the Hebronites for their ingratitude to the man, whose subsequent recovery brings about the redemption of the whole community: 'So his business was not theirs? And yet, days after his initial rage had subsided, his rain still coursed through secret channels of the hills to feed the roots of living things, to send the sap pulsing through branches which sprouted green leaves that sparked as they caught the sun and breathed in moisture . . .' (p. 71).

Obadiah shares the focus of The Hills of Hebron with Miss Gatha, and in their creation Miss Wynter shows genuine psychological acuteness. In the months that follow his sudden eclipse and humiliation, Obadiah concentrates his demented energies on nothing but the discovery of the man for whom Rose carries a child. The search becomes an obsession with him; it attains pathological intensity as time goes on. Failure to find the man brings Obadiah to the brink of madness. In his jealous fantasy, Obadiah sees the image of the man in every face, and although Miss Wynter does not take us directly into the subjective world of the deposed Elder, her objective description of his external actions and physical deterioration mirrors his psychological degeneration: 'They had seen his hair sprinkling gradually with grey, a white patch like an arrow pointing at the top of his forehead; his mahogany skin darken to a charcoal-black, tighten like cured leather around his skull, his left kneecap showing through a hole in his trousers whose seat had been rubbed shiny and threadbare; the piece of vine he used for belt holding up the spare folds of cloth around his waist, his shirt torn and caked with dust, stained by the sap of leaves, the juice of berries' (p. 65). If ever there is a verbal image of a figure of misery and desolation, this is certainly it! Miss Wynter shows Obadiah's disintegration as a function of his febrile imagination, and she depicts him with sympathetic understanding and psychological realism. Unfortunately, Miss Wynter cannot sustain her performance; at the climax, her creative imagination seems to falter. When Obadiah pounces on Rose in the darkness, mistaking her for the adulterer, Miss Wynter finds the situation beyond her imaginative capacity. The problem is both psychological and artistic. Obadiah must be made to act in a manner that is consistent with the portrait Miss Wynter has drawn of him; yet, at the same time, Miss Wynter must make sure that she does not alienate our sympathy from the character by making him cruel and too eager for revenge. Milton had a similar problem with Eve in Paradise Lost, and solved it brilliantly. Miss Wynter does not handle the problem in her novel successfully: at the critical moment, she simply allows Obadiah to indulge in an apologetic and unconvincing monologue that concludes as follows:

> "You understand why I have to kill you, don't you? . . . You see, man, what you did isn't so much that it's right or wrong as that it just can't be done. Man, what you did was to take away from me the one thing that was private to me . . . private from my neighbor, private like what was between the wood and me when I was shaping it with my hand. You must and bound to understand that, man. I know you understand. Stay same way, stay quiet to hear your sentence."
>
> (The Hills of Hebron, p. 80)

Obadiah is prevented from carrying out the sentence of death through the kind intervention of a benign moon: 'The moon rose from behind the hills and brightened the sky.' Obadiah recognizes Rose and kneels down beside her, while nature rejoices: 'The moonlight turned Hebron into a magic world with silver branches, glittering leaves and live crouching shadows under the trees' (p. 81). It is not until near the end of the novel that we learn that it was Isaac who raped Rose. The long concealment of this fact clearly indicates where Miss Wynter's artistic interests lie; namely, in reaction rather than in action.

The reconciliation of Obadiah and Rose operates in the novel as a redemptive force. On a personal level, Obadiah swiftly regenerates. Through his painful sufferings he learns the charity of forgiveness, and discovers that the imagination holds more terrors than reality. He consigns Isaac to a remote corner of his mind, and only recalls him with pity and understanding. For the Hebronites who abandoned him in his greatest hour of need, he holds no resentment. He is determined to bury the past and contemplate only on the future; and looks forward with eagerness to the care of his wife and the life they will share together with the child he now calls his own.

The re-entry of Obadiah into the stream of humanity releases in him a burgeoning spirit of creativity. Without conscious effort, Miss Wynter tells us, the wood in Obadiah's hands takes shape and form. Whether or not Miss Wynter wants to suggest that

Obadiah's woodcraft 'is the instinctive expression of an obscure heritage preserved in the African personality,'[2] as Ramchand argues, has now become a bone of contention between the critic and the author.[3] The immediate effect, however, of Obadiah's woodcarving ability is economic relief for the community. With the money that Obadiah obtains from the sale of his sculptures, he buys food and water for his family and the community. More relevant to the thematic concern of the novel, Obadiah comes to realize that their social salvation lies in a mutually creative relationship with the outside world:

> 'But when I folded my hand to grasp it, to hold all that was God, there was only a doll for a child to play with! . . .
>
> 'But I knew then that Hebron could never die, that Hebron would have to wake up from its slumber, from its little folding of the hands to sleep, would have to wake up from its long night to create the day!' . . .
>
> 'And the first thing we are going to do, starting tomorrow, is to build a good road, a broad road out into the world!' . . .
>
> 'And up and down this road we will walk carrying the work of our hands to exchange for a man who will teach us how to read, and our sons!'
>
> (The Hills of Hebron, p. 312)

The intensity with which Obadiah expresses his conviction, and the emphatic point in the novel at which it is made, seem to suggest that Miss Wynter agrees with the character.

The Hills of Hebron ends with a coda of reconciliation. Miss Gatha sees her ambitious schemes for Isaac crumble, when her son deserts the village and flees abroad. She grieves for a while, but when Rose gently places the small bundle of warmth in her lap, she begins to thaw. Her suspicion that it was Isaac who raped Rose is confirmed. But she discovers, much to her relief, that the baby is whole. For the first time in her bitter life, Miss Gatha breaks down and cries freely. The community is once more reunited under the progressive, realistic approach of Obadiah. Miss Wynter makes the resolution of the human crisis in the novel coincide with a rebirth in nature.

An intellectual awareness of the West Indian situation, not a direct observation of human experience, appears to lie behind the inspiration, and ultimately behind the failure, of The Hills of Hebron. Ramchand notes the most obvious weakness of the book when he observes that The Hills of Hebron 'is an overloaded work by a West Indian intellectual anxious to touch upon as many themes as possible.'[4] What is perhaps a more damaging criticism is the failure of Miss Wynter to shape the wide range of her interests into a coherent literary form. The result of this failure is a work characterized by prodigal inventiveness and an agile intelligence, but a total absence of discipline and control.

Merrill Ferguson's Village of Love (1960) is perhaps the most explicit example of a West Indian work of fiction that explores the possibility of social redemption through communal living. Set in St. Xavier, an imaginary island in the Caribbean, 'where the wealthy get wealthier and the poor continue to starve, or to be eaten alive by disease, dirt, vermin and hopelessness' (p. 30), the novel tells the story of the struggle of Anthony Parron, a blind war-hero, to create a co-operative community in which people at the bottom of the social and economic ladder can live and work together with pride and dignity.

Parron credits the success of his enterprise, not to the security he provides, but to the power of love:

> 'You see, Mr. Ashford, we believe that Love is not an abstraction but a law, a real, potent law. We believe in that law. . . . All species have certain laws which govern them and the more complicated the species the simpler and more direct is the law. . . . Man is governed by the law of Love. A simple law with a double consequence: obey it and survive, disobey and it will remove its protection and leave chaos behind. . . . We obey the law of Love which is the only aspect of life that we can entertain now. . . . Love tells that we are dependent on our fellow men, that we are responsible for our fellow men.'
>
> (Village of Love, pp. 50-52)

Ironically, the very success of Parron's project spells its destruction. Partridge, the political demigod in St. Xavier, sees the presence and popularity of the community as a definite obstacle to re-election, and threatens to level it to the ground. When Parron refuses to buckle under Partridge, the guns roar; and the human wall of resistance that Parron sets up to block Partridge crumbles as the people scatter hysterically to dodge the rain of bullets. Several of the leaders are killed, including Parron, and with him his utopian dream.

Ferguson makes no pretence that his book is anything more than an attempt to record the efforts of desperately poor people to add some semblance of decency and self-respect to a 'hungry and hopeless existence.' Seen from the perspective of such novels as The Children of Sisyphus, Season of Adventure, and The Late Emancipation of Jerry (1968), however, Village of Love sharpens our awareness of the kind of self-interest and greed for political power that strangle the West Indies. The demolition of 'Love' stands as a savagely ironic commentary on the political imagination that finds it necessary to destroy a self-sufficient community while such places as the 'Dungle' and 'Forest Reserve' are allowed to exist in a conspiracy of silence and complacency. But beyond this socio-economic and political theme, Ferguson conceives Village of Love as an allegory of the charity of love and brotherhood pitted against selfishness, avarice, and materialism. Early in the novel, Ferguson gives Parron the opportunity to define his philosophy: '"No man . . . seriously believes in the existence of any other man. But he will. Sooner or later he will truly realize that he is one of a family and he will awaken to a new way of life. He will realize his dependence, his union with all living things"' (p. 50). Such a firm belief in the unity of man must necessarily seem ironic in view of the fact that the furnaces at Auschwitz had not yet gone cold at the time it was given expression. And yet, paradoxically, it is because of such human atrocities that Parron's conception of a world of love seems salutary. Ferguson apparently shares the faith of his hero and his optimism that his experiment '"might well be the answer to the problems of St. Xavier, to the world perhaps."' For although Partridge wins in the confrontation with Parron, it is the veteran who is posthumously given the victory. At the end of the novel, Ferguson tells us that Partridge commits suicide after his defeat at the polls.

In all fairness to Ferguson, it has to be said that his moral vision is not as superficial as it is made to seem, although Partridge and Parron are unquestionably stereotypes on the opposite ends of the moral spectrum. Ferguson depicts Partridge as the embodiment of unmitigated evil: the man is given no redeemable qualities. Parron, on the other hand, epitomizes all that is good and noble in man, but Ferguson is careful enough to show that he is not without tragic flaws: intellectual pride, a faith in humanity in excess of all the evidence, and an unconscious tendency to self-martyrdom constitute his hubris. Parron reminds us of the eponymous hero of Conrad's Lord Jim. Parron is as responsible as Partridge is for the destruction of his community and his own death much in the same way that Jim brings about the slaughter of his men and his own downfall. There is one crucial difference in the response of the two men to their respective errors in judgement: while the Englishman remains true to his romantic idealism to the very end, the West Indian panics and pathetically runs for cover, tremendously shaken by the display of such human cruelty and by his sudden realization of the needless sacrifice of human lives to satisfy his messianic ambition. The possibility that Parron's physical blindness may come to be seen as an expression of moral blindness may not have occurred to Ferguson.

Although Village of Love is overtly preoccupied with the need for social reform, Ferguson embodies another West Indian concern in his use of Michael Ashford as the narrator of the novel. In the early pages of the work, Ferguson presents Ashford as an upper-middle class white West Indian who is arrogantly self-conscious of his superior social status. More importantly, Ferguson portrays Ashford as a cruelly selfish young man who is emotionally and spiritually dead. Ever since his discovery of his mother in the act of sexual intercourse with their black gardener, Ashford has become hard, bitter, and sexually predatory. His several affairs with women, which earn him the reputation of a libertine, are coldly dispassionate and utterly meaningless to him. But when Anna, a sensitive and sentimental Negro girl, takes her life after she learns that Ashford has merely used her, the young man, in a state of guilt and remorse, flees to the village of Love and joins up with Parron.

Ashford's flight to the village of Love represents less of an escape and more of a journey in search of his humanity. The novel describes his growing involvement with, and commitment to, the community, his recognition and grateful acceptance of love when it comes, and his gradual realization that the people with whom he has chosen to live are real and human: 'Always in the past they had been blank blobs in a street-corner group, or loud voices that kept me awake, or complaining shadows that whined for gratuities. The pain they must have felt had no meaning to me, was removed from my experience as the death of a single coolie in China was removed from me. But now, now I saw them whole and saw them real and they were pure pearl' (p. 101). A similar change occurs in his attitude to nature. Before his transformation, the sights and sounds of the land irritate Ashford; at the end of the novel, he becomes sharply sensitive to their presence: 'The fallen tree beneath me is damp with the evening dew and the moisture it has sucked up from the soil. I am very much aware of it. I am aware of all the little sounds around me and of every little change in the hilltop breeze. My mind scurries after everything -- every rustle, every puff of the wind' (p. 268).

The exploration of the alienation of the middle class West Indian from the working class and his spiritual regeneration through closer contact with them looks back to both Minty Alley and Season of Adventure (1960). As we have already seen, James handles the theme with considerable artistic grace and smoothness, and as we shall see in the next chapter Lamming explores it with astonishing intelligence and originality. Nonetheless, it is this aspect of Village of Love that interests the reader and gives the work its literary value.

In a fundamental sense, the main weakness of Ferguson's novel stems from its point of view. It is true that the first-person narrative technique has been effectively used in many a great novel as an instrument of analysis, but in this novel the choice of Ashford as the main narrative voice is a technical blunder. Ashford is much too impressionable a character, much too sycophantic an admirer of Parron, and much too emotionally close to the action to achieve the necessary distance for an objective, critical report of the experience of the novel. But it is a tribute to Ferguson that he wisely decides to describe certain events and incidents which could not be known to Ashford in the third person. By so doing, Ferguson manages to avoid some of the ridiculous strategies that Mrs. Allfrey has to resort to in The Orchid House (1953) in order to manoeuvre her narrator, a minor character in the novel, close to scenes where she has no business to be. Still, Village of Love would not be a vastly improved novel whatever the method of narration chosen: narrative perspective is only a symptom, not the cause of the failure of the work. Village of Love suffers from a flaccidity of creative energy, a flatness in characterization, and a complete absence of dynamic human interaction. Ferguson does not seem to be able to dramatize people in emotional and psychological difficulties. Nothing in the novel is more depressing than the insipidity of the scenes which involve Ashford and the sexually frustrated Dorothy, except perhaps the trite Epilogue which concludes in this way:

> I am a man, and pain is the enemy of man. And suffering the enemy of man. And I must war with pain, and show no quarter. I must love. I must love as the Teacher loved, so that all suffering is my suffering and all pain my pain. Tomorrow is a long time coming, and I live now. So my hand is out, my heart is willing, my life is ready.
>
> Suddenly, I am not afraid and I am no longer sad. I know why Teacher, and Dorothy, and Ralph, and Luther, the crippled Seymour are where they are.
>
> I stand up and I look at the flickering wood fire and at the swinging lamp. And I know that the avalanche of blood and time and tears could not bury them. But it has buried Partridge. And it buried him because Parron lived today.
>
> (Village of Love, p. 286)

By 'Parron lived today' we are to assume that love not only triumphs over evil; it also transcends time and space. But the last word on the novel belongs to Ashford: in his declaration of war against pain and his willingness, indeed his resolve, to take on the whole burden of humanity, the character insinuates that he identifies with the man from Galilee.

Christ-like figures appear frequently in West Indian fiction, but it is in Mais's Brother Man (1954) that the figure is the centre of attention and is treated with a high degree of literary seriousness. Moreover, it is the author, in this particular instance, who deliberately creates the parallel and persistently makes the identification, and not the character, as we have seen in The Hills of Hebron. Nor is it teasingly left to the reader to draw the inference, as we have done in A Quality of Violence and A Village of Love. Bra' Man, the hero of Brother Man, is not aware that he casts the image of Christ, although he consistently fills the role. This distinction is essential, if only it helps to explain Mais's reluctance to satirize the character. Of course, it is also Mais's way of ensuring our sympathy for Bra' Man.

In a sense, Brother Man is an extension of The Hills Were Joyful Together. The setting is again the Kingston slums. The theme of socio-economic oppression also survives. In another sense, though, the novel could be seen as the obverse of its predecessor, and is therefore complementary to it. The main purpose now is not so much to recreate 'the dreadful conditions' of the Jamaican working classes, as it is to seek a way to ease the burden of their miseries. In The Hills, Mais is satisfied to expose the social problems, not solve them. But at one point in the novel, he ponders the possibility:

> Somewhere in the world something to redeem them . . . resolve their doubts, blot out their deeds . . . resides something . . . like love trembles on a young girl's lips,

> unspoken . . . waits laughter to lighten, now, and
> right them . . . redeem them, resolve them . . .
> redress them . . . somewhere in the world.
>
> (The Hills, p. 201)

In Brother Man Mais offers an answer that quite simply amounts to the rediscovery of our humanity: the novel positively explores the redemptive possibilities of love, charity, and compassion in a dehumanizing world.

To describe the concern of Brother Man in these terms is to draw attention to the extent to which the author grounds his fiction in the moral teachings of Christianity. But it is necessary to point out that Brother Man is no more the product of a religious sensibility than The Hills Were Joyful Together is the outcome of a sociological imagination. Mais probably had less hope that institutional religion could assuage the condition of the poor than he had in the socio-political process. Yet, Mais never abandoned his faith in the innate goodness of man and his potential to shape his moral life. We see evidence of this even in a largely pessimistic novel like The Hills. In Brother Man Mais gives full expression to his belief in the redemptive power of love, tolerance, and charity through the practice of Bra' Man.

It will serve no useful critical purpose to show how deliberately Mais models Bra' Man on Christ; it is enough to say that the parallels are close, perhaps too close to allow Bra' Man to evolve as a viable character, and the novel itself to develop spontaneously. Both Brother Man and its protagonist suffer from a certain stiffness, which is probably due more to the archetypal framework within which they are placed than to a low level of creative energy in the author. Still, it would not be fair to say that the work is simply a mechanical enumeration of parallels between the life of Christ and that of Bra' Man, although the predictable consistency with which Mais pursues the analogy vitiates the narrative.

Bra' Man's career follows the typical messianic pattern of success and failure. In the beginning, the people believe in him, they trust him, and rely upon him; later, when they lose faith in him, they turn against him with primitive violence: 'When they had mauled him to the satisfaction of their lust, they voided on him and fouled him' (p. 188). Bra' Man is sadly disillusioned by the sudden change in the people towards him:

> The people whose sick he had healed carefully avoided him in the street; the people he had helped in their hour of need openly jeered at him, and shouted insults after him up and down the lane.
>
> He was greatly distressed about it. Not because they despised and rejected him, and would humiliate him to the dust, but because he had such faith in people, and knew that people had such need of faith in something, if the world were to be saved from poverty and disease and suffering and insufficiency and frustration to the furthest day.
>
> He had tried to bring a ray of hope into their lives, to make each man aware, somewhere, somehow, of his own innate dignity as a man.
>
> But he had lost every inch he had gained at a single blow, because all believed him guilty.
>
> And this was the hardest thing of all.
>
> He saw where his service to his people would be at an end.
>
> (Brother Man, p. 174)

But Mais does not end his novel on this note of defeat: the people are made to return to Bra' Man in contrition, and the sight of their humility restores the dying faith of the Messiah in his mission and in humanity:

> He turned and smiled down at her, gently patted her hand that rested on his arm.
> 'Yes, yes, you're right, of course, you're right.'
> 'They'll all come crawlin' to you yet, an' beg to you forgive them.'
> He just bowed his head before her. His heart was too full to speak.
> He saw all things that lay before him in a vision of certitude, and he was alone no longer.
> 'Look at me,' he said.
> Her gaze met his, unfaltering.
> 'You see it, out there, too?'
> She looked up above the rooftops where that great light glowed across the sky.
> She said: 'Yes, John, I have seen it.'
> 'Good,' he said, and again, 'Good.'
> He moved away from the window, back into the cool dimness of the room beyond.
> And she went before him, carrying herself proudly, shielding the little flame of the candle with her hand.
>
> (Brother Man, pp. 190-191)

The critical response to this ending of Brother Man varies. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o sees it as a triumph for Bra' Man, whose 'vision of certitude' represents 'a kind of transfiguration.'[5] Ramchand holds more or less the opposite view. Commenting on the 'vision of certitude,' he writes: 'Unless we are meant to imagine that Bra' Man is indulging in a superior irony over Minette's understanding, the novel ends overoptimistically as far as Bra' Man's public prospects are concerned.'[6]

Mais apparently began Brother Man as a tragedy. We take our cue from the deliberate dramaturgical structure he imposes on the action of the novel, which divides into five parts, and from the Chorus he places at the beginning of each act, and which comments, in the fashion of the Greek Chorus, on the universality of the action:

'The tongues in the lane clack-clack almost continuously, going up and down the full scale of human emotions, human folly, ignorance, suffering, viciousness, magnanimity, weakness, greatness, littleness, insufficiency, frailty, strength' (p. 7). But if the novel evokes the tragic emotions of 'terror and pity,' it is not from the humiliation of the hero; rather, it comes from our 'terrified consciousness' of the suddenness with which normally decent folk can become a hysterical mob and turn upon the very man, who has taken the responsibility of their social and spiritual redemption, with the savagery of a wolf pack upon a wounded animal.

The question that the reader must ultimately ask of Brother Man is this: how practical are the powers of love and forbearance in a life of poverty, misery, and hopeless degradation? Alternatively, how seriously are we to take a work that is informed by this vision? The question, of course, is not literary, but philosophical or social, and the answer need not determine the value of the work or our appreciation of it as imaginative literature. Still, as T.S. Eliot once said, 'significance' is an essential quality of good art. Unless we are willing to take Mais's 'solution' to the problem of socio-economic deprivation as an imagined possibility, his 'peace and love' proposition sounds a little like the formula of love and brotherhood of man that Ferguson prescribes as a cure for the ills of the world, and just as naive. The whole history of mankind proves the futility of this hope. Sincerity and skill, maturity and an intuitive intelligence, however, distinguish Mais from Ferguson, and also from Earl Lovelace, whose While Gods are

Falling (1965), not unlike Village of Love, has the doctrinal earnestness of a thesis novel.

While Gods are Falling is set in the depressing Laventille slum areas of contemporary urban Trinidad. In what has now become a stale convention for West Indian writers of such crusading fiction, Lovelace opens his novel with a rhetorical strategy that is explicitly designed to evoke an emotional reaction from the reader. Against a familiar satirical attack on the conspicuous wealth of the Trinidad bourgeoisie, Lovelace juxtaposes a 'dreadful picture' of destitute people trapped in a marginal existence, devoid of hope and purpose, and with not even the consolation of a transcendental faith to buoy them up:

> On those hills there, it is not only poverty. It is disorder; it is crime; it is a kind of fear, and a way of thinking; it is as if there is a special, narrow meaning to life, as if life has no significance beyond the primary struggles for a bed to sleep in, something to quiet the intestines, and moments of sexual gratification: indeed, it is as if all Gods have fallen and there is nothing to look up to, no shrine to worship at, and man is left only bare flesh and naked passions.
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 8)

This passage is of crucial importance not only because it identifies the central concern of While Gods are Falling, but also because it shows that Lovelace was fully aware of his novelistic responsibility to translate the symptoms of social and economic frustration into terms appropriate for artistic exploration. Empirical sociological facts evolve into a personal vision of collective human resignation and moral and spiritual degeneration.

Unfortunately, the promise which this beginning holds never materializes. The form that Lovelace chooses to illustrate the kind of materialistic determinism he wishes to show is anything but dramatic. The prevailing socio-economic situation, and the way it conditions the moral sensibility of the people who inhabit this grotesque world, come either through the medium of straightforward description or through a character who embodies the author's views. They are always at second remove, never from direct presentation. The major incident in the narrative exemplifies this central weakness. Several youths from the area are charged with murder. Lovelace expects the reader to see the crime as the outcome of socio-economic repression and societal indifference to the social needs of the young men. But whereas these factors should have emerged from the presented life of the novel, the author records them from the gratuitous perspective of the wailing mother of one of the boys:

> 'But yuh don't have nutten to offer them. Yuh don't even have words to advise them, an' even if yuh have words to tell them, what is words? Children today want more than words. Oh Lawd! . . . They roamin' the street like is a forest they huntin' in. Poor parents don't know what to do again. When they reach a stage, is only God to help them. Only if God bless his eyes on them, they get lucky an' stay outa trouble. But it hard. They have nutten. They seeing so much an' they have nutten. Temptation to thief, temptation to rob, temptation to kill, temptation to hit back at the world that squeezin' them so. Too much people lookin' on an' not doin' nutten, like if they don't know is only bad these children headin' for. Like if they don't know is something these poor children want. Is something that we can't give them. I poor an' what I could give Ruben? What? In the beginnin' I send Ruben to college. Ruben had to leave

> college. Times was too hard. I couldn't make it. Since Ruben leave college, all Ruben ambition wash away. Ruben gone. Ruben vex with the world. Ruben vex with himself. Ruben reach the stage where he don't care what happen.'
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 202)

Despite our objection to the use of Mrs. Walls as an authorial mouthpiece, the general sociological point that there is a direct correlation between the incidence of crime and adverse environmental conditions holds true.

If the predicament of the boys fails to involve us dramatically, Lovelace uses it to unite the public theme of social criticism with the individual story of Walter Castle, the central character. When the novel opens, Walter is shown as a man acutely dissatisfied with the utter purposelessness and lack of direction in his life. The prevalence of crime in the neighbourhood in which he lives as well as a lack of promotional prospects in his job build up in Walter a sense of bitterness that borders on the edge of misanthropy: '"All I'm thinkin',"' he tells his wife, Stephanie, '"is a way to get out. Get away from the job, the people and the city"' (p. 16). In this frame of mind, Walter conjures up an idealistic picture of a pastoral countryside:

> In his mind he sees the countryside so quiet. The earth is wet, and the grass is green and glistens with dew and sunlight. The corn is tall and the ears are long, and blonde hair hangs out from the tassels. Birds are singing in a mango-tree, the mist is disappearing, the chickens rush for feed and scatter when the frog jumps. The cow is being milked and the potatoes are being hoed and there is a big pumpkin under the avocado-tree. Smoke comes from the wood fire and rises to the blue sky. The children bathe in the river and lie down on the bank and laugh, or look at the

> silver water running over the smooth stones on the river-bed and wait for the coscorob to glide out from beneath the stone. The wind rushes, trees lean and shake; the doves coo and walk on the ground, in pairs.
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 127)

This is only a dream, and Walter knows it only too well: his early childhood experiences on a rural farm were anything but romantic. So he eventually decides to remain in the city, but not before the end of a long trip down memory lane that takes up practically the whole day and nearly two hundred pages of the novel.

In his imaginative journey into the past, Walter gropes bewilderingly for lucidity, for some form of clarity that will enable him to grapple with his sense of loss and frustration, for some certitude that will give shape and meaning to his rudderless existence: '"If I could find something here, something big enough to make me forget myself, something high enough to make me reach up to it, then perhaps I could bear the kind of existence I am leading here"' (p. 188). Recollection telescopes his early childhood and adolescence with vivid particularity. He recalls his loneliness at school and the banal life at home; his long resentment against his brother, Andrew, for his uncompromising moral severity and his grudging generosity. Walter remembers his bitter struggle for survival in the city as a young man, his shameful neglect of his family. He travels back in time to the years he spent in the remote village of Nuggle, where the lumberjacks squandered their earnings in gambling and drinking. In his memory he hears the spontaneous confession of his friend, Saga, to clear him of the charge, and the words of the old man, Charles: '"People in the world to help one another"' (p. 57), and those of a contrite and lonely Andrew: '"Alone, a man don't feel good. People need people"' (p. 159). At the time the significance of this observation on mutual human dependence eluded Walter completely. His fierce pride in his own independence and self-reliance had hardened into a spiritually and morally destructive self-centredness. It is the survival of this selfishness at the beginning of the novel that corrodes Walter's sense of values and blinds him to the need for tolerance and understanding. Walter refuses to sympathize with the angry young men and fails to understand that their aggression is the only way they can express their frustration at a society that ignores their plight. It is a measure of Lovelace's artistic control that while he manages to retain our sympathy for Walter, he directs his irony against him; but because the criticism of the character is seen retrospectively, it loses some of its fine edge.

As Walter continues his reverie, Lovelace intimates that the character begins to have a clearer perspective of his life. But this is not really true: it is the reader, and not Walter, who discovers that all his life he had been a passive observer, always on the move when the situation gets critically tough, never actively involved. Walter actually remains blind to the facts of his character. His reminiscence offers little more than a few stray clues to a pattern in his life, and in general his memories are uninteresting. Nonetheless, Lovelace allows Walter to conclude his retreat into the past with the realization of the futility of escape and a growth in self-knowledge that brings a clarity of perception of the world and his place in it:

> He must have been blind not to have seen that there is no other way but to fight in the world as it is, with the people as they are, and with the resources at his disposal.
>
> So the world is me, he thinks. And this land is mine and the people here are my people, and the things that are done in this city -- I also am responsible for them. I am one with the land and I am one with the people.
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 128)

There is a sententiousness in this conclusion that recalls Michael Ashford in Village of Love. But whereas in Ferguson's novel it is the end of a process, Lovelace makes it the beginning of a process that leads to commitment. In contrast to his earlier response to the arrest of the local boys for murder, Walter now, on his own accord, spearheads an ad-hoc committee to arouse community consciousness and participation. His successful involvement gives him personal pleasure and a sense of usefulness; it dissolves his fear and anxiety and ushers purpose and meaning into his life. Towards the end of the novel, in answer to a question from his wife in regard to his thoughtful mood, Walter replies in terms that clearly tell of his moral and spiritual regeneration: '"I'm thinking about how a man . . . About how it makes no sense a man thinking only of himself. And I'm thinking how a man never really knows himself. I mean, really knows what he's capable of. And how it is that a man is always discovering something new, and only when he discovers who he is he knows what life is, what life means"' (p. 244).

Walter's realization that an inflexible individuality is fatal to the moral balance and inner coherence of a person constitutes the climactic resolution of the novel's faith in the vitality and significance of collective human action. Lovelace's achievement in While Gods are Falling allows us to see that the individual who remains in splendid moral isolation in the midst of an oppressive social reality denies his essential humanity, and in a very real sense becomes the victim of the system that he helps to perpetuate indirectly through his refusal to accept his moral and social responsibility. It is the recognition of this ironic paradox that leads Walter to thank Ruben: in saving Ruben he has saved himself.

While Gods are Falling is not a particularly imaginative novel; its major weakness is to be found in the complete ascendancy that Lovelace allows his ideas of social reform to gain over his presentation of the moral and spiritual hardness that results from excessive self-interest. Lovelace seems more interested in an analysis and interpretation of the social conditions which lead to deviant behaviour. The final movement of the novel reads like a debate on the influence of social milieux on human behaviour. With the exception of Walter, the characters who make up the forum lack individuality. Lovelace does not even bother to sketch them roughly: they serve as his 'mouthpieces' and are endowed with his social ideas. With slight variation, they amplify the diagnosis that Lovelace makes through Walter:

> 'I think that the factors of poverty, lack of jobs, general oppression, the attitude of more fortunate people, all contribute to push these young fellows to rebel, to want to hit out, to hurt someone, to want to make people shame and even to want to kill.'
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 224)

Similarly, the program of social reform they propose to start echoes the recommendations that Mr. Sears, Walter's father-in-law, advocates:

> 'What is needed in the national community is a sense of responsibility. We are just a bunch of individuals. That is bad. We must develop a sense of pride in our community. We must feel grand when we accomplish something worthwhile and we must feel shame when a mean act is done in our community. In everything, we must feel personally affected. We must be involved. We can only be involved when we participate. Right now you are participating. That is good. That is the only way a community spirit can be brought out. And if you can get the people of this area to contribute, that in itself would be a form of participation. And I think participation is the fundamental pillar upon which to build a strong nation. If people are to save themselves, they must be interested in themselves. Interested, not in a narrow, personal way, but interested in the community as a whole.'
>
> (While Gods are Falling, p. 215)

There is no doubt that Mr. Sears speaks for the author: Lovelace too believes that it is only in responsible social action that the people can overcome the determinism of their environment. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that fiction merely serves in While Gods are Falling as a framework on which Lovelace can display his solution to the problem of socio-economic oppression.

The optimism at the end of While Gods are Falling is nowhere to be seen in Austin Clarke's The Survivors of the Crossing (1964), a novel that also deals with the way people respond to the desperate conditions in their lives. This is not the only difference between the two works. Clarke is firmly committed to an investigation of the moral and psychological effects of social and economic bondage. Our first clue to this intention comes from the liberty Clarke takes with social reality. The novel is set in Barbados in the sixties, but the situation Clarke describes belongs to an earlier period, closer perhaps to the socio-historical reality Selvon describes in A Brighter Sun (1952). The world of the novel is shown to us as a self-contained community, more or less separate from the larger society, and arranged in a stable social hierarchical structure.

The main narrative action of The Survivors of the Crossing revolves around the efforts of Rufus, an illiterate labourer to organize a strike against the Clapham Hill Plantation, which for generations has held 'the survivors of the crossing' in bondage. At first, it was physical slavery; later it was economic oppression. Secure in the knowledge that the people would perish of starvation unless it offers work to them, the Estate has become complacently confident in its power to control their lives, which it does, outrageously. The workers, on the other hand, are only too painfully aware of their complete dependence on the Estate; and in their supine acceptance of their helplessness render themselves even more vulnerable to exploitation. Perhaps more importantly for our appreciation of what Clarke is trying to show in The Survivors of the Crossing, the very nature of the people's relationship to the Estate has given rise to feelings of ambivalence to its presence. The Estate is at once the only source of their livelihood and a symbol of their degradation which they knowingly help to perpetuate. They look upon it with an air of proprietorship, and proudly refer to it as 'our plantation'; at the same time, they see it as a monument to their bondage and loss of freedom. At the time of the action of the novel, the people's response to the plantation has long ossified into apathy and indifference: they have grown inured to humiliation and subjugation and, with no hope of a change in their condition, drown their frustration in continual drinking.

It is within this framework of moribund stability that Clarke places Rufus, whose sudden emergence from anonymity to personality throws the world of The Survivors into chaos and confusion. Deeply disturbed by the mechanical regularity of his existence, and only too conscious of the futility of his efforts to provide a decent life for his family on his meagre earnings, Rufus proposes to call a strike against the Sugar Estate in an attempt to force it to recognize demands for higher wages. Rufus fails in his endeavour, and not surprisingly so. Rufus cannot hit the ground with his hat, even if he tries, let alone lead the people in revolt against the Clapham Hill Plantation. Clarke comically deflates Rufus and makes a caricature of him as a leader. Rufus has no definite plan to deal with the Estate, and lacks the ability to judge beyond his own intentions, silencing any opposition by brute force. One suspects that in the creation of such a quixotic character as Rufus, Clarke is indicting the West Indian intellectuals for their passivity in the West Indian struggle for social and economic justice.

But if Clarke intimates that Rufus cannot conceivably succeed in his fight against the powerful Sugar Estate simply because he is tilting at windmills, he also makes it clear that Rufus fails because the people will not support him: 'This was the first time in the long dark history of the village that anybody -- not even Jackson the village socialist had ever suggested it -- had come saying he was going to strike against the plantation. It was like refusing to drink the communion wine from the hands of the Anglican minister' (p. 26). To Whippets, the schoolmaster, the idea is scandalous; to the Reverend McKinley, it is sacrilegious; and to Biscombe, the rumshop owner, it is economic suicide, at least for him: '"Strike in this village, mean one thing. People outta work. No work mean no money. And no money mean my sales dropping. So you can't be vexed with me if I say again and again that I 'gainst this strike business"' (p. 29).

Ironically, though, it is the cynicism and apathy of the people themselves that Rufus has to overcome in his crusade against the Plantation. No one takes him seriously; no one believes that he can accomplish anything, not even Boysie, his second-in-command, who cogently expresses the characteristic attitude of fatalism and defeat with which the workers respond to their predicament: '"I don't believe in no damn socialist-thing like you, Rufus. And I still don't feel that if for thousands o' years we been living in this fucking shit, with the plantation breathing down our blasted necks, morning noon and night, I can't see how the hell we could change this by marching 'cross a road, sixty-odd starved-out men, and hope to turn this Clapham Hill village into heaven"' (p. 51).

The devaluation of Rufus by his own people is a fine illustration of the West Indian cultural tendency to denigrate the indigenous, just as in his betrayal by Jo-Jo, and in the scene of confusion that follows, Clarke dramatically hints at a continuity in the historical experience of the Negro:

> Like animals saddled with fear and terror, the people scampered through the dark night, shouting, pushing, crying, and no one singing.
> 'Boysie? Boysie? The money!'
> 'Have it.'
> 'Run, Boysie, run with the money!'
> But before Rufus could move, a light was shining in his face and a voice familiar to him said, in a tired, indifferent manner, 'That is the bastard who call' himself a Gandhi.'
> The voice belonged to Jo-Jo, who was identifying Rufus to Barabbas, the manager and the overseer, and another white man whom he had never seen before.
> (The Survivors, p. 105)

This betrayal may be said to be the proverbial straw that breaks the camel's back: it brings to a climax a series of ironic reverses and traumatic discoveries that had already left Rufus in a state of complete disorientation and bewilderment, with only his delusions of grandeur and his belief in his messianic mission to hold him up: 'These people were stupid, poor, backward, ignorant people, who had to be led. He could lead them. He could lead them. They would be pleased to be led. He could not lead them worse than the plantation had been leading them for generations past. It was his calling in life to lead his people from this prolonged slavery' (p. 102).

Typically and ironically, appreciation of Rufus comes too late. In the final section of the novel, the workers go on strike: 'The villagers took heart after Rufus's conviction for assault with intent to maim, and refused to go back to work on the plantation' (p. 129). This sudden conversion lacks plausibility, but we need not allow this flaw to detract from the dramatic function the strike serves in the novel: Clarke uses the strike to show the new social consciousness which Rufus has somehow managed to awaken in the people, and their tough sense of survival. The strike continues for two months with both sides equally desperate. The people can hardly endure their starvation much longer, and the Estate verges on panic as the canes approach maturity. Clarke shows imaginative integrity and lack of sentimentality in allowing the outcome of the confrontation to conform to the logic of the situation he has created. The plantation wins in the end, but it is the manner in which it scores the victory that Clarke dramatizes his notion of psychological bondage.

The sequence of events which lead to the end of the strike is remarkably ironical. To begin with, it is Rufus who unwittingly provides the excuse for the people to break the strike. The fire he sets to the canes, after his escape from jail, spreads to the factory and mansion, and in response to an imperious call from the Manager, the people, all to a man, risk limb and life to extinguish the blaze. The spectacle of hot, hurrying humanity draws from Whippets the comment: '"Well, be-Jesus God, you can't do nothing bad enough with a black man"' (p. 174). And this comment may well serve as an epigraph to The Survivors of the Crossing, except for the fact that Clarke does not allow this harsh but true realization to drive him to the extremity of cynicism. Clarke keeps the tone of the novel light, although the vision it embodies is a disturbing one. The spontaneous manner in which the people rally to the crisis on the plantation, their eagerness to return to its repressive protectiveness, their easy forgetfulness of their grievances, and their self-recrimination for having allowed themselves to be misled by Rufus -- all these are Clarke's way of saying that the inhabitants of the village of Clapham Hill, and by implication the West Indian people, although politically free, still remain prisoners of the past. The slave in the West Indian still lives. For centuries he has been conditioned to see himself as a chattel, not as a person. The invisible chains of self-hate, sycophancy, and dependence still shackle him; and not until he shakes off these mental residues of colonialism will he ever be free and alive in the true sense of both words.

The way to live freely and vitally is the exploratory concern of Edgar Mittelholzer in Shadows Move Among Them and The Mad MacMullochs (1959). Unlike Clarke, who apparently believes that such a possibility is realizable through social reforms and cultural rehabilitation within the existing framework of society, Mittelholzer seems to think that the full expression of human life and consciousness can only be achieved through a complete and radical change in the social and moral values on which the edifice of society rests. Conventional society, as Mittelholzer sees it, is socially and morally decadent; it is narrow, artificial, and stilted; and the codes by which it regulates moral and social behaviour are superstitious and hypocritical. In each of his novels, Mittelholzer invariably includes a character, usually autobiographical in conception, who voices his criticism of the sterility of modern civilization. There are, for example, Milton Copp in The Life and

Death of Sylvia (1953) and Alfred Dresseau in A Tale of Three Places (1957). But it is Ronald Barkley, the central character in The Mad MacMullochs, whom Mittelholzer allows to shatter the veneer of respectability that conventional society spreads over its rotten core. Ronald is a typical Mittelholzer hero: masculine, handsome, saturnine, full of self-confidence, spiritually empty, and as divided in his consciousness as Geoffrey Weldon in Corentyne Thunder (1941), Brian Leddard in A Tinkling in the Twilight (1959), Paul Mankay in Uncle Paul (1963), and Richard Lehrer in Latticed Echoes (1960). Ronald is drawn to the MacMulloch girls, Evaline and Euphony, whose lack of self-consciousness and inhibition appeals to him. When his fiancee accuses the girls of lewdness, Ronald seizes the opportunity to launch a savage attack on conventional society:

> 'I mean it when I say you're dull and respectable. And I mean it when I say I shall never rest until I find the kind of life I want. What do you think,' he scowled at her, 'I'm such an irascible, intolerable brute? It's because I'm thorougly sick of the stupid, narrow, stilted society in this island -- in this island and everywhere else, for that matter. London, New York, Paris -- they're all the same, only on a larger scale. Huge, sick, stinking messes! I've seen them for myself, as you know, so I can judge. No honesty, no simplicity, no ease, no naturalness. All simpering hypocrisy. Everyone trying to cut a figure. Everyone trying to make as much money as he can so as to undo the other in ostentation. Or to be a power in the land. Greed and envy festering on every doorstep. Superstition masquerading as religion. A moral code that is as hollow as a dried-out calabash. It's not only this island -- it's everywhere in the so-called civilized world, Sybil. Putrescence to the right and to the left. Try to be honest and you're looked upon as insane -- or lewd! Yes, lewd! Because those two girls walk about without brassieres you consider them loosely dressed. Because their conversation is frank and honest -- yes, honest -- you look upon them as immodest, lascivious characters. Yet you go to bed with me in defiance of the moral code

> our society has set up; you do it under cover, privately, secretly, so it's quite proper. You couldn't be a lewd person. You wear a brassiere in public and your conversation is oh so pure, so chaste! Why can't you be honest! Why can't you shout to the world: 'I like going to bed with him, and I do go to bed with him, and who is to say I'm deserving of reproach! To hell with the rest of you and your dishonest morality!' But you couldn't do that! You're too inescapably a sticky segment of the filthy society that produced you! Honesty, sincerity of purpose, benevolence, naturalness are as foreign to your way of life as a chunk of coral from a Chinaman!'
>
> (The Mad MacMullochs, pp. 65-66)

In the society that Mittelholzer imagines in Shadows Move Among Them and The Mad MacMullochs, man would be free from the restraints and constraints which institutional society uses to stifle his natural urges; he would be free from the problem of social and economic security, and be able to shape the structure of his values. He would live in close communion with nature, and in the way nature intends him to live: in the nude.

In Shadows Move Among Them, Mittelholzer takes us up the Berbice River to a remote settlement in the hinterland of Guyana. It is called 'Berkelhoost,' and it is run by the Reverend Gerald Harmston, a member of the Brethren of Christ the Man, in what may seem a truly democratic fashion. Members of the community, for example, enjoy freedom of speech and action. They freely express their emotions and confess their human weaknesses. There is a great deal of sexual permissiveness. Academic and cultural education is liberal, and there is a noticeable absence of materialistic greed and social ambition. But beneath all this, there flows a strong current of despotism. Harmston is a tyrant, who clouts his children for simple breaches of discipline, sadistically tortures

Logan, the incorrigible native, and orders the 'execution' of Sigmund, whose fourth act of theft calls for the death sentence. Less seriously perhaps, but still expressive of the repressive nature of this utopian society, is the control of reproduction. Couples who wish to have children must first apply for permission, and if Harmston determines that it is practical, leave is given.

As an alternative to society as we know it, 'Berkelhoost' does not exactly conform to our idea of a socially just society. In this regard, Shadows Move Among Them is not singular in the tradition of utopian literature. But there is one crucial difference that separates the West Indian novel from the more popular works of utopian fiction: in Shadows Move Among Them Mittelholzer deftly integrates his wish to communicate his conception of a perfect society with the story of Gregory Hawke, the central character.

When Shadows Move Among Them opens, Gregory Hawke is on his way to 'Berkelhoost,' in the hope that the peace and tranquility of the jungle may help to repair his shattered nerves and make him whole again. Initially, Mittelholzer leads us to believe that Hawke is a schizoid victim of his experience in the Spanish Civil War. As the novel progresses, Mittelholzer gives up the symbolic potential of this background, and we learn that Gregory's illness actually stems from his ambivalence towards his wife (now dead), who loved him slavishly ('I wish I could make myself into dust so that you could spit on me and grind me down with your heel. If ever you leave me I'll kill myself. Really, I will,' p. 254), but in whose creative shadow he has had to live:

> 'She went out of her way to diminish my spirit. She was more talented than I, and she maliciously outshone me. In 1934 -- the spring -- I held a one-man show of my paintings -- and in the autumn she put on a show, too -- of some of her own works. She'd taken many of the subjects I had treated and done them better -- supremely better. Deliberately to prove to me her superiority. If I produced a play she produced one similar -- and made a more clever job of it, and invariably scored a big hit. Once I wrote a novel and had it published. It was well received by the critics, but it didn't sell. She wrote one, using the very theme -- almost the very plot -- and it wasn't only a tremendous succes d'estime but it went into three impressions within five weeks. Everything I did she went one better. Deliberately.'
>
> (Shadows Move Among Them, p. 93)

This modification of our reaction to the cause of Gregory's schizophrenic condition is central to our argument that the artist in Mittelholzer is too strong to allow him to sacrifice Hawke on the altar of his criticism of modern civilization. But to proceed with the demonstration. As Gregory surrenders more and more to the salubrious influence of his surroundings, his spirit begins to heal. Not surprisingly, Mittelholzer partly attributes Gregory's recovery to his close association with nature:

> Life on this settlement with these relatives of his had its distinctly absurd aspects, but, at least, it had a simplicity and a freshness that was a soothing change from the complex and diseased world he had left behind. The very sight of the jungle and the river gave him reassurance and a sense of peace he had never before experienced; he was sure he could never grow tired of this setting: he could settle here for good and be happy. He knew himself well enough to be certain of this. The mere thought of city life gave him a feeling of panic. Just to contemplate a scene of traffic and orderly buildings stirred anger and nausea in his spirit.
>
> (Shadows Move Among Them, pp. 257-58)

In the final analysis, however, it is neither in the therapeutic effects of nature nor in his escape from the claustrophobic world outside of the jungle that Gregory finds his psychic balance. Just as Mittelholzer removes the cause of Gregory's sickness from an external stimulus, so he now locates the source of his spiritual recovery from within. A sudden surge of compassion for Mabel Harmston in her 'degradation' opens up a whole new world of values to him: 'Compassion was not an emotion he could cope with when it was he who was experiencing it. In the past, other people had felt it on his behalf; now, virtually for the first time in his memory, he was feeling it on behalf of another fellow human. It bewildered him, because it brought into being new, unfamiliar values' (p. 250). With Gregory now able to feel spontaneous compassion for another human being in distress, Mittelholzer proceeds to humanize him: 'He felt like a human being now -- warm and flexible and easy. The core of his ego had softened; the alloy of conceit had been purged out of it. Now he was able to think more of others and less of the importance of his own destiny; he could feel a pulsing sympathy for his fellow-men' (p. 255). And in the wake of this inner release, Gregory comes to realize that it was his selfishness and lack of compassion that had driven Brenda to suicide, and had been the real cause of his nervous breakdown:

> Inside him, as he had watched her, he had felt a contraction: an anguish of discomfiture and confusion. Something had fought hard for expression, but it was as though the accumulations of the past were too much for it.

> Now, here in the jungle, he understood what it was that had been struggling to manifest itself. He had wanted to be sorry for her; he had wanted to feel compassion. Compassion had been a hard knot in him that would not untangle. It was his incapacity to untangle it that had built up the tinder-like tension of frustration in him; the psychiatrists who had treated him had never diagnosed that. He had had to come all the way into this wilderness to diagnose it himself.
>
> (Shadows Move Among Them, p. 255)

At the end of the novel, Gregory decides to marry Mabel and settle down in 'Berkelhoost.' But Mittelholzer is realistic enough to show that Gregory does not come to accept the settlement as the ideal society the Harmstons proclaim it to be, only as a refuge from the chaos and complexity of the modern world. For Gregory, as it is for the reader, the journey up the Berbice river, like the more famous ones in Conrad's Heart of Darkness (1899) and Harris's Palace of the Peacock (1960), is less a movement away from civilization than a symbolic voyage into the dark interior of the soul. Shadows Move Among Them may not offer us an attractive alternative to conventional society, but as a psychological study of a mind in turmoil it is profoundly revealing.

In his 1967 'Edgar Mittelholzer Memorial Lectures,' A.J. Seymour quotes from a letter in which the Guyanese author spoke appreciatively of Shadows Move Among Them: 'It is a novel as I like, and want to write, a novel.'[7] Mittelholzer apparently liked Shadows Move Among Them so much that he returned to its informing social ideas eight years later in The Mad MacMullochs (1959). In this novel, Mittelholzer carries his ideas on social reorganization much further, and expresses greater intellectual assurance in their soundness.

The model society that Mittelholzer now offers for contemplation differs from 'Berkelhoost' only in setting and sophistication. The hinterland settlement is now replaced by a racially experimental community founded by the MacMullochs on their plantation in Barbados. It is heavily fortified. Philosophically, this second utopia rests on the moral foundation of 'strength, discipline, alertness, and courtesy' (p. 129); politically, on the practice of true democracy: the people collectively determine the laws and rules which govern them; socially, on the ethic that accepts every one on an equal status: the community disapproves of class or colour distinction; and economically, on the principle of self-sufficiency: each member works, and is paid in 'points,' which he uses to buy food and other necessities which the community provides. This system, it is argued, prevents greed and corruption, since 'points' are not transferable, and because people are assigned to jobs for which they have a special aptitude, job-satisfaction is optimum, production yields are high, and human resources are fully utilized. Other values include a broad education that places equal stress on the acquisition of academic knowledge and empirical skills; the nurture of artistic sensibilities; and the encouragement of cultural and intellectual pursuits. But behind this ideal social order lies the group's wish to 'live as pleasant, easy, natural yet cultured and civilized an existence as possible' (p. 130).

There is, of course, nothing particularly new in this aspiration; it is the raison d'être behind the creation of all experimental and speculative communities, fictional as well as actual. Nor are the ways by which Mittelholzer allows his community to realize its goals altogether original. Many of the specific ideas on social reform that Mittelholzer advances in The Mad MacMullochs can be found in B.F. Skinner's Walden Two (1948), a controversial 'novel' that has now become a classic of modern utopian literature. But it is not the familiarity or the staleness of the ideas that makes the culture Mittelholzer proposes in his novel less attractive; nor the fact that the MacMulloch plantation is a nudist camp, and some of the social innovations the MacMullochs introduce are bizarre. Rather, it is because the MacMulloch community, like 'Berkelhoost,' denies more freedom than it allows. It is true that the people seem to live freely and happily. But they pay a high price for this. The very collectivist nature of their enterprise, which is largely responsible for its success, paradoxically leads to a suppression of individual awareness and autonomy. The community comes first, and to preserve its integrity, drastic measures are often taken, on the premise that the end justifies the means. Absolute conformity is required, and although the MacMullochs provide for contingencies in human behaviour, the forms they take usually amount to social ostracism. The wayward members are consigned to a special section, while the 'Eugenics Department,' whose function is to 'keep our population free from human vermin' (p. 127), does what is necessary. Married couples must keep a record of the frequency of their sexual intercourse; they must first obtain permission from the appropriate authority to have children, who are then taken away from them. Group care of children, it is argued, results in psychologically healthier children, and in a stronger bond between parents and children, not in the attenuation of personal and emotional ties.

Mittelholzer is evidently more severe and comprehensive in his criticism of society than any of the other writers we have studied, and more radical in his proposal of an alternative. Nonetheless, if there is a single conclusion to be drawn from all the works, it is the unanimity with which the authors seem to voice the idea that society fails to provide a life of decency and dignity for the people at the bottom of the social and economic ladder. In each of the novels also, there is a further suggestion that the individual is the source of his own redemption. This theme carries over to the next chapter, which focuses on the individual in search of himself.

Chapter III

Rootlessness and the Quest for Identity

The experience of rootlessness and loss of identity is a universal malaise of the twentieth century, but the peculiar nature of West Indian history, as V.S. Naipaul observes, makes it especially acute for the West Indian, and adds a further dimension to the responsibility of the West Indian writer: 'Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands.'[1] Usually, comments made by Naipaul on the West Indian social and cultural scene evoke as much controversy as the literary mode of satire he employs in his creative work. For George Lamming, at least, Naipaul's criticism of the brutality and grossness of West Indian society and his use of satire in his fiction are evidence of his self-hatred, emotional alienation, and shame of his colonial heritage:

> His books can't move beyond a castrated satire; and although satire may be a useful element in fiction, no important work, comparable to Selvon's, can rest safely on satire alone. When such a writer is a colonial, ashamed of his cultural background and striving like mad to prove himself through promotion to the peaks of a 'superior' culture whose values are gravely in doubt, then satire, like the charge of philistinism, is for me nothing more than a refuge. And it is too small a refuge for a writer who wishes to be taken seriously.[2]

Yet not even Lamming would take Naipaul to task for his remark on the uniqueness of the West Indian cultural situation and the role the West Indian writer should play in helping the West Indian discover his identity.

Sociological studies on the cultural dislocation of the West Indian leave much to be desired, and, as in the case of the delineation of the West Indian social situation, we have to rely on works of prose fiction for an analysis and interpretation of the problem. It is no accident that the novels which deal with the twin themes of deracination and the search for personal identity were written by the second wave of West Indian writers who came upon the West Indian literary scene in the wake of World War II. They grew up, literally and figuratively, in a period of intense national and cultural consciousness. There is, however, an early novel that anticipates the direction in which the West Indian novel was to move in the hands of the younger generation of West Indian novelists. I refer to Mendes's Pitch Lake (1934), a sombre study of the progressive moral and psychological deterioration of a rootless Portuguese youth, whose sole ambition in life is to move up the social ladder.

Pitch Lake has a simple, linear structure: the novel chronologically traces the progress of Joseph da Costa from social anonymity through the near realization of his goal to the tragedy that turns his dream into a horrible nightmare. In the process, Mendes dramatically excoriates the shallowness and superficiality of the social world Joe so desperately wishes to enter. The focus of the novel never swerves from Joe, through whose eyes Mendes presents the narrative events. The use of Joe as the centre of consciousness allows Mendes to achieve considerable artistic coherence and economy, and the reader to appriase the character on the basis of his action and his reaction. Nonetheless, Mendes's scrupulous fidelity to the narrative consciousness results in a loss of social density. Joe is no Stretcher; he possesses neither the delicate sensibility nor the keen sense of observation with which Henry James endows the narrator of The Ambassadors, and because his horizon stretches no further than his petty ambition, the external world of reality hardly registers on his senses. We know very little of the circumstantial quality of the world in which he moves, and not a great deal about the people with whom he comes into contact. The other characters exist on the periphery of his consciousness; but Mendes does manage to convey the impression that they lead active lives. In the final analysis though, the particular narrative strategy that Mendes adopts in Pitch Lake is of critical importance, and is appropriate, since the nature of reality that the novel seeks to communicate depends largely on our ability to perceive the ironic discrepancy that lies between the way Joe sees the world and himself and what in fact they both are.

Early in the novel, Mendes presents Joe as a young man who is acutely dissatisfied with his life in the backwater town of San Fernando, and particularly sensitive to the ironic gap that exists between the low social status he commands as the son of a rum-shop owner, and 'the social recognition that his colour and connections told him should be his natural inheritance' (p. 319). Joe seriously believes that his white skin is enough to guarantee his admission into the upper rungs of society, and automatically gives him the privilege to treat the lower classes with disdain and contempt. It is therefore pure gall and bitterness to his pride when he is made to serve the very people whom he despises. For Joe there can be no greater humiliation, no greater degradation for a 'white man,' except perhaps his marriage to a black woman. In Joe's structure of values sex with women of an inferior class is his privilege; but social intercourse is strictly forbidden, and marriage is utterly demeaning. So when Miss Martha suggests that he marry her daughter, Maria, the common barrack-yard girl who has been his mistress for some time, Joe breaks out in a cataclysmic rage: '"You've got a blasted cheek asking me to marry your daughter. What do you take me for? Go and ask one of those little coloured boy friends of hers to marry her, not a white man. To hell with you"' (p. 45). But Mendes allows Miss Martha to avenge this insult in a way that nearly ruins Joe socially. Much later in the novel, when Joe has begun to move in the high social circles of Port-of-Spain, Mendes brings Miss Martha to the city, ostensibly to demand satisfaction from Joe; in reality, the author wishes to exact his own form of punishment on the character. There is manifest delight in Mendes's description of Joe's panic as he conjectures from the sound of the footsteps in the yard that it has to be Maria and Miss Martha:

> Wild notions rushed into his brain and out again: he would go back to San Fernando, look for a rum-shop job, and resume the relationship with Maria: he would take the earliest boat for New York, try and leave with his father. His father would be leaving soon. He must try his best to get a passage with him. . . . He felt insufferably hot. The perspiration oozed from all over his body and face; but here came a

> momentary relief, for he could not be seen.
>
> (Pitch Lake, p. 211)

In his actual confrontation with Miss Martha, Joe discovers that reality can sometimes hold greater terrors than the imagination, especially when you trifle with a virago like Miss Martha (see pp. 214-215).

Mendes goes through Joe's early life rather quickly. When the action moves to Port-of-Spain, the narrative pace slows down considerably, and the main concern of the novel begins to take shape: essentially, it is to reveal the crassness and philistinism of the society with which Joe wishes to identify, and the personal difficulties which stand in his way. Mendes could not have struck upon a more appropriate occasion to introduce Joe to the world of his dreams than the formal social dance that he arranges for him to attend. The ball, given by, and for Portuguese of social prominence, is an impressive affair. It symbolizes for Joe all the glamour and splendour of high society. His starved imagination responds to the glittering lights, the beautiful women, the witty conversation, and the infectious excitement. But Joe declines to participate in the gaiety which seems to him to spurt naturally and spontaneously from the urban socialites; and as we enter into his consciousness, Mendes allows the character to express his painful experience of social eclipse and spiritual isolation. In a world where external appearance matters more than personal integrity, Joe becomes conscious of his physical shortness and the kind of clothes he wears. Unable to interact, as the others do, with social ease and grace, Joe begins to question his place in this gathering:

> He was a stranger in the midst of this because he was unaccustomed to it; and though the girl to whom he was just introduced might be thinking him a rather nice fellow, and though even now Cora might be scanning the ballroom to see if she could locate him, he was convinced that this was no place for him, that he was out of his element, as a fish must be when it is out of water; or better still, as a worm must be when it is taken from its earth-hole and deposited on the clean table of the scientist. His lonely sensation was a sign to him of the falsity of his being in this room. And bitterness expanded within him.
>
> (Pitch Lake, p. 119)

It is worth noting, though, that Joe's sense of isolation derives from his consciousness of his lack of refinement and culture, and not from any awareness of the hollowness and inanity which surround him. Mendes's withdrawal from Joe's consciousness to make the following caustic observation is one of the rare instances in the novel the author intrudes in the narrative: 'It was impossible for one of his kind to discover the mental mediocrity underlying all this glare and glamour of movement and sound. If even he had known he would have doubted his knowledge and would have felt just as despised as he was feeling now. He could see only the outward refinement of the function: the well-dressed men and women, their cultured greetings of each other, the dazzlingly lighted hall' (pp. 118-119). Artistic flaw aside, the phrase 'one of his kind' is a miracle of compression in the context; it directs the edge of the criticism away from Joe as an individual to the kind of mentality that informs the class to which he belongs.

Joe never fully overcomes his feeling of social inferiority. Memories of his squalid background continue to haunt him. So when his relationship with Cora Goveia, an independently wealthy and popular socialite, begins to burgeon, Joe seizes the opportunity to realize his goal, and proposes marriage. Cora accepts. As the couple plan their future together, Joe learns from Stella, the Indian maid, with whom he has been having a clandestine affair, that she is with child. This sudden turn of events throws Joe into a state of shock. He sees his whole world crumble to pieces; and when his efforts to procure an illegal abortion for the girl fail, Joe loses his mind, and in a moment of blind rage and frustration he bashes Stella to death:

> There was nothing left for him to live for, and she, the little coolie bitch, was the cause of it. "Coolie bitch, coolie bitch!" he screamed at her. She was now jammed against the partition, hard against it, fright all over her. His knees were touching the bed. He was leaning over the bed. He wanted to get at her, to strike her, to make her feel that she had wrecked his life. His clutching fingers scraped her dress and she sprang from their menacing grasp, screaming as she did so. She was making for the door! -- By God, she wouldn't, by God, she wouldn't! He rushed at her, held her just in time, threw her back, pushed her, pushed her until she was again against the partition, but this time free to him. There was a chair not three yards from him. Jamming her with one hand, with the other -- the right -- he gripped the chair. She screamed again, tried to extricate herself, but now his mad anger was a thousand times stronger than her frail fear. He raised the chair above his head with one hand, quickly brought the other to it, and, as she leapt from the partition, he brought the chair down on her head with a crash. She fell, but he struck her again on the head, two, three times, until he saw her face bashed in, the blood in a round neat pool about her head. With the chair upraised, he was staring at her. She looked funny. Her face was all covered by cuts and blood. Her mouth was wide open and he could see her teeth, white and even. She was perfectly still.
>
> (Pitch Lake, p. 351)

Mendes ends the novel with Joe in flight: 'He stood up and glanced furtively around. The instinct for protecting himself gradually asserted itself, and, not daring again to look at Stella lying dead on the floor, he went to the door, opened it, and stepped out into the night.'

In an interview which took place in 1973, Mendes openly acknowledged his indebtedness to Theodore Dreiser, but went on to explain that Pitch Lake differs from An American Dream in conception and execution: 'The theme of my first novel was that racial prejudice leads to death.'[3] Surely this is an over-simplification of the concern of the work. The real power of Pitch Lake lies not in the sequence and consequence of the events which the novel describes, but in the battle that takes place within the consciousness of the central character. It is this inner drama that proves the more interesting, and the one towards which Mendes, by his choice of point of view, wishes to direct attention. We would be in a better position to establish this claim if we take a close look at the central character.

The story of Joe da Costa is straightforward enough, but the consciousness through which Mendes allows it to reach us is far from straightforward. Joe is a mass of contradictory impulses. It is this characteristic that defines Joe more than his obsession with social recognition and racial autonomy. As the novel develops, it becomes increasingly obvious that as an artist Mendes is not so much interested in Joe as a victim of social determinism as he is in a character whose lack of moral strength results in self-deception, fear, vacillation, and, especially, self-disgust at his gross sensuality. A look at an early episode in the novel will help to make this point clear. Before Joe leaves for the capital, he decides to burn all bridges behind him, and this includes the decisive termination of his liaison with Maria. The course of action Joe proposes to take admits no compromise; in his imagination, he rehearses the procedure he will adopt: it will be swift and final. But when Joe meets Maria, all his resolutions vanish into thin air. As soon as Maria begins to caress and kiss him, a wave of lustful desires wells up in him, and Joe falls, as he will do so many times in the course of the novel, a victim to his carnal passion. In a very real sense, this episode is paradigmatic of the emotional and dramatic structure of the novel, which may be said to turn on the conflict that results from Joe's high social aspiration and his low sexual urges. More specifically, Mendes uses the incident to prepare us for the central dramatic crisis in the novel.

Joe's relationship with Stella brings out both the best and the worst in him. The affair begins innocuously enough. Joe is drawn to the girl by her innocence and helplessness. Her bitter experience with sexually aggressive males in households in which she has worked before strikes a sympathetic chord in him, and evokes 'something in him that was fine and noble' (p. 82). Instinctively, Joe is moved to pity; to him, Stella appears as a child who is in need of protection and undertakes to provide this service. But even as Joe entertains these magnanimous sentiments, he warms to

Stella's sensual appeal. He begins to notice her firm breasts and shapely legs, and to think of her in sexual terms. But no sooner does Joe become conscious of the train of his thoughts, than he is ashamed. Still, his imagination continues to dwell on Stella. One moment he sees her as a defenceless girl who needs his care and protection; in another, as a desirable woman whom he wants to possess.

This rhythm between his passion and compassion for Stella provides the shifting perspective through which Mendes draws attention to the struggle Joe undergoes to preserve the integrity of his motivation. Ironically, it is Stella who tips the precariously-balanced scale of Joe's ambivalent responses to her. When she proves receptive to his subtle advances, Joe's noble intention retreats from the losing battle it has been waging, and he surrenders to his irrepressible sexuality. As he watches Stella glow with joy and happiness at the cheap pair of stockings he uses to bribe her into a demonstration of her affection for him, Joe rises to a pitch of intense emotion:

> Now he was gazing at her and longing for her to kiss him as she had once before kissed him. He could see her chest heaving. She was, like himself, undergoing some emotional experience, and the realisation of that moved him almost to ecstasy. If she didn't come to him quickly, then he would go to her. He felt that he couldn't help himself. The long days of restraint had so aggravated his desire to speak to her that now he not only wanted to speak to her but also to touch her, to hold her whole little body in his arms, to crush it against his chest. For the minute he did not see her childish face; and the child-like light dancing in her eyes was changed for him now into something more rousing and yet more sacred.
>
> (Pitch Lake, pp. 103-104)

Stella does come to Joe, and he devours her hungrily. The knowledge that Stella is a woman, and not a child, bursts with clarity upon his imagination. Mendes, however, delays the consummation of the relationship for another eighty pages, during which time Joe begins to make perceptible progress with Cora.

Joe refuses to accept any moral responsibility for his seduction of Stella. In characteristic fashion, he seeks to find some justification for his action. First he blames Stella. It is she who has seduced him; he has merely yielded to her sensuous body. If Joe's logic here seems tipsy, Mendes shows how completely irrational the young man becomes as he proceeds to invent excuses: it is the work of the fates, under whose influence he has no control over his action. He is a pawn to be manipulated at will. Consequently, he cannot be held personally culpable. Moreover, Stella is an orphan, who is at the mercy of men, who will sooner or later take her and then abandon her. So to avert -- not anticipate -- this eventuality, he has taken her himself. Through such specious rationalizations, Joe defends his seduction of Stella, and appeases his tortured conscience. It never occurs to him that he confesses his own guilt by the very need he feels to vindicate it.

Mendes records a similar process of self-deception when Joe decides to discard Stella. Stella is a mere servant girl, Joe reasons, and is lucky to have a white man take notice of her. He has done her a favour. Besides, he has been generous to her: on two separate occasions he has given her presents: a pair of stockings and a pair of panties. Moreover, it would be highly unreasonable of Stella to expect him to continue their liaison indefinitely. In any case, there is no need to fear: Stella is an orphan who has no mother like Miss Martha to make trouble for him. But even worse than these self-deceptive arguments, Mendes shows a progressive moral decline in Joe as he contemplates his future with Cora. Joe feels no sympathy for Stella in her visible distress; in fact, the girl grows repulsive in his eyes: 'She seemed commonplace, vulgar, bending down and exposing her thighs, her breasts standing up firm from beneath her bodice. Her dark face too was somehow or other unpleasant, and yet she was the same as she always had been. It was her thighs and her breasts and her face that had once attracted him to her; now it was those very things that repelled him' (p. 259). Still, Joe continues to see Stella, despite his revulsion for her and his resolution to stay away from her.

Joe's response to Stella's news that she is pregnant is quite in character:

> "For whom, for whom?" he asked in a hoarse whisper.
> She was obviously puzzled but he was angry again.
> "You've been going with other men, you little bitch!"
>
> (Pitch Lake, p. 308)

Joe of course does not believe one word he says. His reaction is purely situational, and it contains more self-deception than desperation. The scene that immediately follows is both pathetic and bathetic:

> He went suddenly weak. His legs were almost giving away. Then a great desire came over him to cry. He fought against it, but the next moment he was on his bed, crying like a child. His world had cracked and gone to pieces. He felt Stella's hand on his head, then he knew that she was lying against him, crying too.

> Her frail body shook against his. He heard her broken voice begging him not to desert her, not to allow her to be thrown out into the streets. She was alone in the world. There was nobody to whom she could go. She would kill herself if he deserted her. It was his baby; she would swear before God it was his. She loved him. She had never loved anybody else, and it was he who had made her love him.
>
> (Pitch Lake, pp. 308-9)

Morally reprehensible as Joe is in his self-indulgence, it is in passages like this that Mendes shows how atypical is his hero among the socially ambitious fictional men who find themselves in a similar situation. The example that comes readily to mind is Carlo da Silva in Frank Hercules's Where The Humming-bird Flies (1961), a novel that brutally satirizes race prejudice and social pretension in the West Indies. When Mary Redeson tells da Silva that she is pregnant, the near-white young man becomes beastly in his rage, and violently abuses the mulatto girl:

> "You low, whoring bitch," he began. "Where the hell you think I come from? Brasso?" The residents of this part of the island had a somewhat undeserved reputation for stupidity. "Woman," he continued, "you kiss my arse! If you think you can make me responsible for your black nigger bastard, you are sadly mistaken, you worthless bitch you!"
>
> She heard him in a bruised daze. She could not shut out his voice, but the darkness mercifully blotted out his face. He went on, breathing hard in an ugly passion of hatred, and slobbering insults at her.
>
> "I had a mind you were goin' to try this," he declaimed violently. "My grandmother warned me what you were like. But I didn't listen." His indignation mounted higher. "If you think you will get a damn cent out of me or if you brass-face enough to tell my father, I'll kick your stinking black bastard out of your dirty guts! You blasted nigger whore! I have a mind to give you a damn slap . . .". The back of his hand struck her on the head with brutal force. Stunned, she fell backward.
>
> (Where The Humming-bird Flies, p. 89)

Joe cannot conceive of a constructive way to handle his crisis. Typically, he consumes a great deal of nervous energy in useless vacillation: he alternates between self-disgust and self-glorification, between revulsion for Stella and compassion for her. In one moment, he thinks of abandoning the girl and deny ever having an affair with her; in another, he decides to confess to Cora and break off the engagement. In the end, Joe does absolutely nothing, and simply gives himself up to the luxury of self-pity.

Learning that Stella is pregnant brings to an end an extremely harrowing period of anxiety, fear, and uncertainty for Joe. But the discovery raises an even greater problem for the young man: how to keep the girl's condition from becoming public knowledge and at the same time conceal his own involvement. The idea of an abortion, a sensible one under the circumstances, comes from Myra, and when this fails, Joe can think of no other alternative: 'He felt there was something he ought to do, he must do, but he did not know what it was' (pp. 350-51). Fictional convention allows the reader to anticipate the fate that awaits Stella, but the idea of murder never occurs to Joe, and even while he bludgeons the girl to death, Mendes shows that the crime is unintentional.

Moral cowardice may perhaps be the central characteristic that distinguishes Joe, and may very well be the tragic weakness that brings the final curtain down on his social ambition. But it is his moral blindness that lingers with us. The process of his experience shows no growth in his perception of the realities of society and life. He acquires no self-knowledge, no psychological realization. His burning social ambition clouds his moral vision, and up to the end of the novel when he murders the girl who he believes is responsible for the frustration of his dream, Joe fails to discern the illusory value of his quest. Joe is as much a victim of his own character as he is a victim of his society, and an expression of it as well. Like Joe, the outworn social milieu Mendes describes is dead; it is intellectually sterile, effete, and spiritually impoverished. The restricting values Joe holds are the values his society approves. Few West Indian writers have managed to interweave the presentation of character and social commentary as inextricably as Mendes does in Pitch Lake. None has given us a character like Joe, who makes such a mess of his life because of his failure to integrate motive and action.

Dr. Ramchand pays a marvellous tribute to Mendes in his description of Pitch Lake as 'a staggering intimation' of Naipaul's A House for Mr Biswas (1961). But the continuity to which Ramchand refers is no more than the persistence of 'the tradition of social realism and compassionate protest'[4] in West Indian fictional writing. There are, however, more specific areas of similarity between the two works to justify the tribute. To begin with, both Pitch Lake and A House for Mr Biswas are historical novels, although not in the same sense, and certainly not in the way Vic Reid's New Day (1949), which dramatizes the growth of Jamaican nationalism over a period of nearly a hundred years, is a historical novel. Pitch Lake recreates for us the social and cultural atmosphere of race and class consciousness which Mendes finds within the Creole Portuguese community in Trinidad around the time the novel was written; A House for Mr. Biswas takes for its socio-historical background the East Indian presence in Trinidad from the turn of the century to the mid-forties.

It would be misleading to argue that the social phenomenon that Mendes describes in his novel no longer obtains in the West Indies. The problem, however, does not exist currently on the same scale as it did then, and when Mittelholzer wrote A Morning at the Office (1950). Pitch Lake will survive as a work of literature, but in the years to come it will be a source of valuable social information. A House for Mr. Biswas too will prove impervious to the attrition of time, but even now the novel could be read as a realistic analysis of the process of decay and decomposition which the Indian culture has steadily undergone since its importation in the West Indies. The world of A House for Mr. Biswas belongs to history; the human experience it depicts is timeless.

It is in the creation of a weak, rootless central character who desperately needs to validate his existence that Mendes significantly anticipates Naipaul. Unlike Joe da Costa, who aspires to gain a foothold in the glamorous world of urban Trinidad Portuguese, Naipaul's Mr. Biswas spends his whole life trying to escape from the deadly stranglehold of the Tulsis, the huge traditional Indian family into which he marries. It is this struggle that Naipaul uses to give A House for Mr. Biswas its aesthetic shape, and Mr. Biswas a measure of dignity and heroism in an alien world which comes perilously close to reducing him to a chattel.

A House for Mr. Biswas is a monumental work, epic in scope and distinction, and as solid and profound an exploration of the human condition as Buddenbrooks. The temptation to add to the mountain of critical commentary that has steadily grown on top of the work is difficult to resist. But the particular aspect of the novel that concerns this investigation has received more than its share of critical attention. To follow the succession of houses in which Mr. Biswas has lived from his birth to his death is to enter into a nightmare. But to follow his efforts to acquire a house of his own, and to trace his struggle against a world impervious to human ideals and aspirations, is to recognize in this petty little man, whom Naipaul treats with a very special quality of sympathy blended with satiric awareness, the courage and tenacity of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming odds.

The house that Mr. Biswas wants so desperately, and struggles all his life to acquire, is not simply a piece of real estate property, or an expression of bourgeois ambition; it is his spiritual refuge against an encroaching world. The house on Sikkim Street, however precarious, comes to stand for stability and continuity. Above all, it symbolizes Mr. Biswas's triumph over all that life has to offer, and vindicates his existence: 'How terrible it would have been, at this time, to be without it: to have died among the Tulsis, amid the squalor of that large, disintegrating and indifferent family; to have left Shama and the children among them, in one room; worse, to have lived without even attempting to lay claim to one's portion of the earth; to have lived and died as one had been born, unnecessary and unaccommodated' (pp. 12-13).

To continue further in this analysis of A House for Mr. Biswas would be to tread on familiar ground. I should therefore like to turn to the work of Ismith Khan, another Trinidadian writer. In his essay 'Dialect in West Indian Literature,' Ismith Khan argues that 'the foremost concern of the artist from the West Indies' should be with 'that desperately needed core of identity'[5] which is lacking in the West Indian. Whether or not we agree with Khan is of less importance than our awareness that he successfully discharges this responsibility in The Jumbie Bird (1961) and The Obeah Man (1964). Both novels are centrally preoccupied with the problem of identity.

The Jumbie Bird begins where A House for Mr. Biswas ends, and it too draws upon the East Indian presence in Trinidad. But unlike Naipaul, who ranges over a much wider period, Khan chooses to focus on the predicament of the Indians at a dramatically crucial juncture in their history. The action of the novel takes place in the late nineteen forties, at a time when Trinidad was in a state of transition. The process of change from a simple, agricultural society to modern industrialization, an intimation of which is given by Selvon in A Brighter Sun (1952), had already begun, and the dislocation in the economic structure was to have profound effects on social and cultural realities. It was around this time too that the solidity of the Indian culture had begun to crumble, and the Trinidadian Indians were caught between two worlds, one dead, and the other, if not powerless to be born, was one which they had resolutely refused to accept. It is this situation of limbo in which the Indians in Trinidad found themselves that Khan uses to explore the possibilities of a creative identity.

The main human centre in The Jumbie Bird is Rahim, a second generation Indian, but in the opening movement of the novel Khan is concerned with the deracination of the migratory generation:

> With the warm, pleasant climate of Trinidad the outdoors became the home of the old and decrepit Indians like Mongroo and Kareem, to while away their time, their entire lives, what was left of them. Many of them had left the sugar plantations long ago and come to the city. They had lost their trade, their ways of ploughing and sowing, they had come to the city to wander, to spend the rainy nights under the Town Hall, curled into the stoops of the buildings across from the Square, dreaming dreams of rains falling and monsoons pelting at their eardrums somewhere in Hindustan, only to be awakened by boys of Jamini's age who threw stones at them from behind the bars of the Square at night, or the steel-heeled policemen who stomped and clack-clack-clacked at their ears, moving them on into the lonely wet corners of night that wept with them till morning came.
>
> (The Jumbie Bird, pp. 27-28)

The reaction of the Trinidadian people to the presence of the old men, who have given 'their youths and strengths and energies . . . in building up the colony' (p. 9), is anything but sympathetic: 'The old derelicts in some way marred the scenery by littering the park with their soiled shreds of clothing, their sad eyes filled with a strange yearning and discontent that everyone shunned, but had to put up with, since they had abandoned the last vestiges of life when they left the sugar cane plantations and came to the city to wander' (p. 28).

To appreciate fully the pathos of this scene of human desolation that Khan so movingly evokes, it is necessary to expand the historicity of the novel a little more. The pattern of illusion and disillusion constitutes the drama of the fate of the indentured Indians. Attracted by the propaganda of the West Indian planters who needed another cheap source of labour, and lured by the promises of easily-acquired wealth, the Indians migrated to the West Indies full of hopes of becoming rich. Their intention was to make their fortunes as quickly as possible and then return home. Their dream never materialized, and their stay gradually lengthened. Some had the courage to leave, but the majority, too ashamed to return in poverty, remained. But they never gave up hope of ever going back. In the meanwhile, they held aloof and tried to maintain their cultural distinctiveness in isolation. In The Jumbie Bird, Khan gives us an instance of this attempt to retain the past: Kale Khan proudly invites the Indian Commissioner to attend the Hussay festival so that he can 'see with his own eyes how faithfully they kept pace with their mother country, how they had never forgotten their homeland, and how true to the minutest detail they had tried to preserve their heritage, their culture, their marriages, feasts, religion, and festivals' (p. 188).

The rejection of the old men by society only serves to intensify their loneliness and to emphasize their condition of exile. With no sense of belonging, they turn within themselves for consolation and companionship:

> The talk wove in and out. They chanted in their broken, raspy voices about the coming of the rain, and a quiet happiness stole across their hearts, a quiet consolation, a feeling that all that was not as it seemed, and they believed it, for as the rainy season came, and the rain came falling full days and nights, the mango ripened, the Keskeedee sang, the seasons of weddings followed, offerings to the poor for the good year came around. They could already smell the odours of curry cooking in large yard-wide cauldrons, nestled in holes dug into the ground, blazing orange-red with fires that made the milky rice-water bubble, that sent smells of coriander, cumin, saffron and the magic spices of Hindustan tracing through the wet air of evenings. They would meet and talk and tell tales of long ago, they would see the children of their children marry in the month of the rainy season and the ripening of the mango, and their doubts were fired once again with new hopes, pulling the loose ends of their incomplete circles together.
>
> (The Jumbie Bird, pp. 83-84)

The quotation is a fine illustration of the deep compassion with which Khan treats the old men whose precarious hold on life seems to lie in their collective pretence.[6]

Presiding over this forlorn group, and indeed over all the characters in the novel, is the impressive figure of Kale Khan. The old man is explosively energetic, obdurate, incorrigible, and as fierce in his pride as he is intransigent in his independence. Candid and irascible, Kale Khan voices criticism which Ismith Khan would have found rather awkward to work smoothly into the narrative texture of the novel. From the care, understanding, and sharpness with which the old man is drawn, one suspects that his reality is much more than fictional.

Literally and figuratively, Kale Khan is the animating force in the novel. He is the pivotal centre around whom all the other characters revolve, and in him Khan consistently locates the vitality of his novel. Similarly, the major dramatic events in the novel are shown to radiate from, and gravitate to, him. The old man is the last bastion of the hopeless and the dispossessed. On him they pin all their hopes of repatriation, for which he constantly agitates. Yet, it is ironic that Kale Khan should pose as the champion of his people. The old man has no patriotic love for the country of his birth: 'He hated India from which he had fled, and he hated Trinidad to which he had come to find a new life' (p. 8). Kale Khan even holds the very people for whom he fights in mild contempt, and often disparagingly refers to them as 'low-class coolies in bond.'

It is this ironic dissonance that Khan deposits in the position of the old man that makes the character more psychologically complex than he initially seems, and complicates our response to the turn of events near the end of the novel. When the Indian Commissioner tells Kale Khan that he was not 'sent to Trinidad to revive old quarrels, that the past was dead and over, that India was no longer at odds with the British, and that India wished that they would settle here and try to make this place their home' (pp. 199-200), the old man seems to die from within: 'He felt a horrifying loneliness seize him . . . there was no home, no land peopled by men among whom he could walk and feel that it was his world, his home, a world that did not leave him alien and a stranger in the streets' (p. 200). In a symbolic gesture of total defiance (see p. 201), the old man contemptuously chooses death rather than live in a condition of double exile.

We can interpret this action of the character as typical and logical, and still argue that Khan does not even realize how dangerously close he comes to presenting Kale Khan as a victim of his own self-deception. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that although Khan wishes us to sympathize with Kale Khan and his desperate efforts to stand erect, with dignity and pride, he does manage to retain sufficient critical perspective on the old man. Nowhere in the novel is this more clearly seen than in his exposure of the unreality of Kale Khan's campaign for repatriation, and in his location of the moral insight of his fiction in Rahim.

Rahim was born in Trinidad, and although Khan gives us very little detail of his early life, we know that he was brought up in the traditional Indian culture, and felt safe and secure in the world in which he grew up. Rahim was never faced with a situation in which he was required to exercise discrimination and choice. All his actions and decisions had the sanction of tradition behind them. For him it was natural that he should become a goldsmith as his father was, and should marry and then love. The custom did not strike him, as it did Mr. Biswas (p. 82), as odd, much less as a trap, as it comes to appear to Tiger, the central figure in Selvon's A Brighter Sun, when life seems to close in on him:

> "They married me to you, and I didn't even know you, or where you came from. Up to now I don't know what sort of woman you really is! All now so, I could have been a man, and I would have meet a girl I love, and get married to she when I could afford it. You think they give me anything? They give me a cow and this old mud hut in Barataria, and they give me you. Look at you. You ain't have no sense, you ain't even pretty."
>
> (A Brighter Sun, p. 155)

Like Tiger, Rahim was married to a girl he had never seen until his wedding day: 'They went on foot to the bride's home, and Rahim saw her face for the first time; and when he took her home they spent days, weeks, shyly telling each other about themselves, looking at each other . . . he knew that love would have been old, and tired, if they had known each other beforehand, he knew that the excitement which swelled in his bosom like pain with the wanting was right. . .' (The Jumbie Bird, p. 71).

Clearly Rahim possesses neither the range of experience nor the cultural resilience to cope with the rapid social changes that now begin to besiege his consciousness:

> 'Well -- sometimes ah does wonder, wonder if t'ings wasn't good in before times. Sometimes ah does t'ink the old man have he reason. . . ah mean, well, is hard to explain but sometimes ah really doesn't know what good and what ain't good for we. An' it look like if t'ings does happen while you ain't even noticin' them, like of all we fall down in a river and we ain't have no way to get out; and when t'ings happen we just have to obey them . . . like if we have a master.'
>
> (The Jumbie Bird, pp. 67-8)

Rahim is bewildered by the turn of events in a way that his wife and father are not. Kale stubbornly refuses to abandon his traditional way of life and insists on the preservation of old customs; and although it is this complete immersion in the past that blocks his acceptance of reality and finally breaks him, it cannot be said that he ever bends under the pressure of the wind of change. Meena, on the other hand, lives entirely in the present. She notices the dramatic changes which proliferate around her, but they do not bother her. Her need to break away from the old way of life makes her more responsive to the acculturative process than Rahim.

Neither Meena nor Kale Khan understands the fear, confusion, and anxiety that invade Rahim; they do not suffer from the kind of cultural dislocation that Rahim experiences. In the novel Steppenwolf (1963), Herman Hesse gives us a passage that puts clearly into perspective the problem of cultural dualism that Khan explores in his novel:

> Human life is reduced to real suffering, to hell when two ages, two cultures, two religions overlap. . . . Now there are times when a whole generation is caught between two modes of life with the consequence that it loses all power to understand itself and has no standard, no security, no simple acquiescence. . . . Haller belongs to those whose fate it is to live the whole riddle of human destiny to a pitch of personal torture, personal hell.

As with the German, so it is with the West Indian. Once Rahim senses that he can no longer rely on the authority of the norms and values which had given structure and definition to his life, the unity and coherence of his identity begin to break up, and it is not long before he descends into anomic hell: 'Eternity is a long time for my soul to wander, and I feel it falling off the ledge, falling down into a bottomless, soundless sea' (p. 105).

From this point in the novel, Rahim begins to withdraw deeper and deeper into his shell, and as his loneliness grows in intensity, his family relationships shrivel proportionately. Rahim becomes insensitive to the needs of his wife, who soon packs up and leaves; he vents his frustration on his son, who starts to roam the streets; and he avoids his father, who despairs at his inertia and self-destructive introspection: 'He became sullen as he thought of Rahim's strangeness, his energies draining away on things he could never know, while time was running on and he knew that Rahim would not act; would wait and be cut down as he fought within himself' (p. 108). There are times when Rahim would like to share his suffering with Meena, to ask her 'to explain to him, to tell him what was this unseen thing that drove him night and day into a restless world that made him feel like running, moving until he was tired, but afraid to sleep, afraid of lying in bed at night tormented by the questions that hid in the darkness' (p. 144). But he never does; instead, he continues to agonize over his problem in solitude and tries to fill the void within him by drinking.

Khan combines several factors to reintegrate Rahim and to restore him to the community of man. To begin with, Rahim comes to realize that his place is in Trinidad, not in India which exists only in his imagination, perhaps not as the 'featureless area of darkness,' as Naipaul sees it, but certainly as a land for which he has no emotional attachment: '"Barp, where we have to go? We done born and live here, what we go do in Hindustan?"' (p. 109). Rahim discovers that home is not simply a matter of geographical location, but an attitude that one holds towards oneself, and that identity does not depend upon the stability of society; rather, it is a reality that comes from within:

> 'A man have to find a work in this world, he have to do something that great -- I don't mean big -- I mean something that only he could give to the world. You wonder why they teaching you all kind of things in the school, you wonder what use they have? That is because you have to look and look till you find that one work that make for you, a work that it ain't have

> nobody else in the whole wide world could do like you. That way you could put something in the world that it didn't have before. That is the thing I find in my work, and although you don't like my trade, must always remember that it have that something in it for me and that is what I want you to find out, because if a man can't find that something then he life finish!'
>
> (The Jumbie Bird, p. 223)

In this passage, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of each individual, and on his capacity to achieve spiritual wholeness through the social use of his special skill, Khan offers his conception of a creative identity that transcends space and time.

On the narrative level, this confidence in the ethical value of work that Khan instills in Rahim awakens in the character a sense of social purpose and meaning, and brings peace to his emotional life. Meena returns, and Jamini agrees never to give up until he too finds his particular speciality (p. 224). Towards the end of the novel, when an American, for whom Rahim had done some work years ago, again commissions him 'to make one of the finest sets of jewellery,' the goldsmith begins to feel 'an old old pride welling up in him again':

> The kind of feeling that emanates from the marrow, the kind of feeling a man is convinced has gone dead and dry in him. It was this feeling that almost drew tears to his eyes, for it was like coming to life again, and he plunged into his trade with the little tools he had, feeling that reward at the end of the day that only loving accomplishment could bring. As he lay in bed those night rehearsing all the small details of design, the subtleties of wiring and soldering, the new shapes and forms that came cascading through his mind, he felt that he could go on and on, carried along on the wonderful tide of this new hope. No more did he wonder whether there were people in the vast world who paid a casual glance to some fragment of his work. Now he knew that his dreams, all the way down to the little jewel boxes housing some brooch, some pin, were something real and that in these thoughts lay his reward -- that fleeting glimpse of our eternity that he had felt whispering at his fingertips.

> This was so, and the world had not forgotten him. Somewhere someone would say, rotating a piece of his work, 'I wonder who made it . . . I wonder if the jeweller in Trinidad ever thought that his handiwork would come this far.' These things he knew were so, and there was nothing in the world that could change this, nothing that could take this away from him.
>
> (The Jumbie Bird, pp. 219-220)

Like Dmitry in Dostoevsky's Brother Karamazov, Rahim too can claim: 'A new man has arisen in me.'

The Jumbie Bird owes much of its total impact to the dramatization of the effects of social and historical forces within a concrete human situation. The Khan family is real and recognizable, and although the very composition of the household clearly indicates that Khan intends the family to serve as a microcosm of the history of the East Indian in the West Indies, the response of each member to the acceleration of change is highly personal. Meena accepts it; Kale ignores it; and Rahim finally discovers a way to live with it. The book suffers from two major defects. First, Khan loads the work with characters and incidents which he fails to integrate within the main dramatic design of the novel; and secondly, his attitude to the central issue is ambiguous. Intellectually, Khan identifies with Rahim, but his creative sympathies lie with Kale Khan. The old man comes through as the more vivid and vital character. Khan's achievement in The Jumbie Bird might have received more critical recognition had not Lamming in The Castle of My Skin (1953) and Naipaul in A House for Mr. Biswas (1961) examined the dynamics of social and historical change with considerably more skill and literary finesse.

In The Obeah Man, Khan continues his exploration of the possibilities of a creative identity in a world of moral chaos and cultural decadence, but the details of the action are quite different from those of the earlier novel and he exercises firmer control over the narrative material, giving the work a tighter organizational unity. Moreover, The Obeah Man is written with greater assurance and confidence, although Khan occasionally slips, and the language lapses into rhetorical floridity: 'The new-born day barely blows its birth-water from its nostrils when the great amber ball of the sun lashes the pale pink-tongued hibiscus to a shrivelled purple-blue with its whip strokes' (p. 39).

The centre of focus in The Obeah Man is Zampi, the obeah man, who also serves as the centre of consciousness. Zampi is a curious anomaly. Not only does he differ from the stereotype of the obeah man; he 'has no race, no caste, no colour; he was the end of masses of assimilations and mixtures, having the eyes of the East Indian, the build of the Negro, the skin of the Chinese, and some of the colour of all' (p. 11). Ordinarily, we would associate the conception of such a character with the writer's intention to explore the social and psychological difficulties of a racially mixed person. West Indian fiction abounds with examples of middle class half-castes who are torn asunder by their mixed racial background. We may even go so far as to anticipate in such a character some expression of a lack of personal substance. But Khan happily disappoints us. By conceiving Zampi as a man 'with no race, no caste, no colour,' Khan wants to debunk the myth, de rigueur in so many West Indian novels, that personal identity depends largely on the discovery of ancestral origin; at the same time, he forces us to respond to Zampi as a human individual, not as a racial type, whose need for coherence has nothing to do with his racial ambiguity, but a great deal to do with conflicting impulses within him.

Like Rahim, Zampi battles his problem in his mind. The Obeah man is astride two worlds: on the one hand, there is the world of the spirit, objectified in his practice of obeah, which he has come to regard as an art; on the other, there is the world of the flesh, identified with the woman Zolda whom he loves. The former exacts the painful condition of self-sacrifice and self-discipline; the latter demands social and human intercourse. The struggle to reconcile these two worlds is the fundamental source of Zampi's inward tension.

The action of The Obeah Man takes place against the background of the feverish atmosphere of carnival, and it involves three other characters besides Zampi: Massahood, Hop-and-Drop, and Zolda. Because Khan chooses to begin his narrative *in medias res* and work backwards through the reflective consciousness of the obeah man, it is perhaps best to proceed in some kind of chronological order in the analysis.

Zampi was not always an obeah man; at one time he was a Bacchante, given to self-indulgence of every kind. Then suddenly the glut of physical experience left him curiously empty, and he withdrew to the Blue Basin in Diego Martin where under the tutelage of the mysterious old man, Jimpy, he was taught the secrets of obeah and the values of self-control and self-denial. Unlike the typical obeah man, who preys on the fears and superstition of the people, Zampi feels that it is his responsibility to use his power and skill to alleviate pain and suffering. For Zampi, the practice of obeah has become more than a profession; it has become the source of his spiritual restoration: '"The only thing that count for me was the first time a woman come here with a sick child . . . roasting with fever. She say somebody put a bad spirit on the child, and I make the child well, well, well. It ain't have no feeling in the world like that for me. All I want is more and more of that feeling"' (p. 67).

The novel opens with Zampi's return to the city after an absence of four years. His ostensible motive is to ascertain the truth about Zolda. Rumour has it that she has another man. But Khan insinuates that Zampi is drawn to the city by impulses which lie below the surface of his conscious awareness: the hunger for the frenzy of carnival, and the rum and sex that go with it (see pp. 39-40). Be this as it may, Khan arranges for Zampi to be placed in a morally challenging situation just as Milton contrives for the Lady in Comus to be found in a situation in which she has to rely on her own moral strength to defend her honour and life. Zampi's return to the city is not simply a matter of dramatic necessity; the whole value of the moral vision of the novel rests upon it. The exercise of self-control, like the preservation of chastity, is a meaningless virtue unless it faces the challenge of real temptation and danger. Khan knows this, and his setting of the novel during the hectic days of carnival is the clearest indication of this awareness.

Carnival, in the popular imagination, is associated with the spontaneity of expression, freedom from social restraints, and the celebration of the senses; an occasion to escape from the confusion and distraction of modern life. In the West Indian literary imagination, carnival is invariably seen as a vital and creative aspect of West Indian cultural life. We get this view especially in Michael Anthony's The Games were Coming (1963), in The Chosen Place, The Timeless People (1969), a massive novel by Paule Marshalle, an American of West Indian parents, and in George Lamming's Season of Adventure (1960) which refers not to carnival itself, but to its constitutive elements of calypso and steelband. The Obeah Man is an exception. Khan sees carnival, not as the apotheosis of freedom and the evasion of reality but as the epiphanic moment of truth, when passions, held in check for the whole year, violently explode, and hidden desires and longing come to the surface: 'All was laughter today when even the ugly, the shy, the maimed, and the too modest, came wriggling, writhing, and seeking, looking for that moment of joy . . . hidden behind a penny paper mask' (p. 8). And if carnival is an authentic expression of West Indian indigenous culture, as it is seen by some, it is one which Khan implies that the West Indian should not be too proud of, since it originates from, and mirrors, a society that is morally and spiritually dead: 'The clock had stopped in the Caribbean, only the flotsam remained' (p. 22).

To this world, then, of sensual indulgence and casual violence Khan re-introduces his hero. His artistic purpose is to probe for chinks in the moral armour of self-control which Zampi now wears. On his first day in the city, he receives a rude welcome: 'a sudden jolt sent him sprawling clean off the sidewalk of Frederick Street' (p. 5). Zampi's response to this incident is as clear an indication of his transformation as it is a measure of his growth in perception: 'There was something ugly, something cruel, about people at carnival time. . . . He wondered if this ugliness was not buried in them all along, and now it showed itself during carnival. . . . [N]ow he thought that it was the carnival, that it did bring out all the nastiness people had locked in them all year' (p. 6). But it is not long before Khan shows the obeah man sliding back into the person he was: 'As the band approached, Zampi felt its savage rhythm steal away his senses. . . . He could almost feel his feet slip into the easy rhythm of the band' (pp. 10-11). It is only through a conscious effort of will that Zampi manages to restrain himself from being absorbed by the amorphous mass of writhing bodies.

Zampi does not find Zolda at the end of his first day in the city. But he does feel pleased at being able to resist the temptation to slip into the festive mood and surrender to the sensuality around him. And yet, as the bands scatter and the tumult subsides, Zampi is seized by an inexplicable sensation of loneliness, which becomes more acute at the Britannia Bar, in spite of the 'ease and composure' which the familiar atmosphere of the surroundings gives to him.

It is at this point that the obeah man realizes that the 'aloofness' which he had earlier attributed to his self-discipline, and in which he had felt a certain pride, is really an involuntary recoil from his former associates: 'He had become an observer, and it was not by choice. He could not slip into the flow of conversation, nor become engaged in those quick friendships over a bottle as he did in the past. He thought of joining a little clique to the left, then another behind him, but he could not think of an appropriate way to begin. And, then, no one had invited him to join them' (p. 14).

The opening section of The Obeah Man moves at a leisurely pace. The narrative can hardly be said to be dramatically tense. At no time does Khan show us that Zampi is in any danger of a relapse. The obeah man's response to the steelband music is kinesthetic, and even if it were not, he recovers his self-possession without any serious internal struggle. But if Khan fails to evoke much dramatic interest in the early stages of the novel, he excels in the vivid recreation of the grand spectacle of carnival in all its sensuous immediacy; yet, he does not allow his sensuous imagination to divert him from his main artistic purpose. He remains in firm control. Sensuous details are clear and precise, but never overwhelmingly suffusive, and they are always functional.

In the ensuing movements of the novel, Zampi still remains the centre of attention, but the narrative focus broadens as the other main characters are drawn into the dramatic design. Massahood and Hop-and-Drop are clearly drawn, though not fully realized. Khan seems more interested in them as symbols than as individuals.[7]

They represent for him the kind of people the world of The Obeah Man produces. In dramatic terms, Massahood and Hop-and-Drop serve as foils to Zampi, and in them the obeah man finds his ultimate challenge.

Massahood, as his name implies, epitomizes brute strength. There is power in his every movement, and he expresses his physicality with every feature and gesture. Khan consistently describes Massahood in terms of animal imagery. Massahood makes his entrance into the novel 'with a leap and bound . . . like a deer' (p. 31); and there is something suggestive of a 'wild animal' in the manner in which he dresses as well as in the way he 'hungrily' pulls on his cigarette. Like Zampi, Massahood belongs to no identifiable race, and his only preoccupations, through which he defines his identity, are the violent subjugation of the weak and the relentless pursuit of sexual satisfaction.

Hop-and-Drop, like Kale Khan in The Jumbie Bird, is the creative triumph of The Obeah Man. The hunchback cripple seemingly has no history, only an eternal present. Time curiously has no erosive effect on his 'ageless face of stone' (p. 88). His origins are unknown: 'Turning time back and back there would have to be a moment when he was, when some lust or love had sucked him from the unknown, yet, looking at his face, there was only a feeling of void, of no point of time where he had his beginnings. No one knew his past or his present, no one knew the architecture of his soul. . . . The architecture of his soul was one with the architecture of his shanty. Built from hundred of odds and ends' (pp. 90-91).

Hop-and-Drop, as Davies notes, 'is in essence the society'[8] in which he lives. Like the cripple, it is stagnated, fragmented, mean, and vicious. Over and above this symbolic function, Khan presents in the hunchback a psychologically penetrating study of a man tormented by consciousness of his defects. Hoppie's grotesque shape makes him the object of general derision; he is goaded, taunted, and ridiculed, and is made to endure every form of humiliation in exchange for a drink and companionship. Outwardly, Hoppie wears a mask of geniality; inwardly, he festers with hatred for all humanity. He loves the company of women; but as his repulsiveness prevents any intimacy with them, Hoppie settles for vicarious satisfaction: the walls of his shack are covered with pictures of the erotic parts of women.

Zolda is the point of intersection at which these three characters meet. Zampi loves her; Massahood openly lusts for her; Hoppie secretly desires her. Zolda appears in relatively few scenes in the novel, but she plays a crucial role in it. Even in her absence she is strongly involved in the action. In her presence the emotional temperature rises to an explosive degree, as Massahood and Zampi tense themselves for the inevitable showdown, which both intuitively sense will determine their relationship with the woman. Aware though she is of the tension she creates between the two men, Zolda recklessly continues to play off one against the other. It is this recklessness that culminates in the carnival of violence at the end of the novel.

The collision between Zampi and Massahood which Khan builds up steadily in the course of the novel finally takes place. In a test of will and strength, Zampi humiliates Massahood. But his victory is pyrrhic in nature: Zolda defects to the side of the vanquished, and Zampi is left alone with his thoughts. The memory of the savagery Massahood displays, and the vindictive bitterness of Hop-and-Drop, forcefully bring the two worlds Zampi inhabits into sharp focus:

> He knew both worlds now. The world of obeah, of waking up in the morning with happiness as he went about his lonely tasks in the bush, of pleasure when some one made the long journey to come all the way up the waterfall to get some little advice, some little charm because he had heard from someone else what wonders he could work. He also knew the world in which Massahood lived. He remembered the mornings filled with fear. Fear of running down with time, fear of death, fear of the chill in his heart when nothing seemed bright with colour and all that was left was the Britannia Bar . . . another day like many, many others before.
>
> (The Obeah Man, p. 127)

The distinction between the two areas of experience is quite specific: the one world inspires fear and uncertainty; the other gives peace and tranquility, meaning and purpose, and a personal sense of satisfaction that comes from doing simple acts of charity.

From this point in the novel, the narrative closes in on the consciousness of the obeah man, as he gropes towards self-discovery. Release from the past marks the beginning of the process: 'His nights of fêtes and debauchery with Zolda had always ended with a feeling of loss, of loneliness, and purposelessness. Now he knew that this day would not rob him of that deep-down joy that fluttered in his stomach like hibiscus petals' (p. 152). A consciousness of the sacrifices he must make, and the price he has to pay, to become a successful obeah man, marks the end:

> He knew that the pangs of guilt and shame some of these people about him were feeling would not be able to touch him. He felt as light as air, and a joy of simply being what he was, an obeah man, warmed him with thoughts of what he had done to become this skilled, with thoughts of what he would do in the days to come. . . . [H]e felt that sweet pleasure and relief that comes with setting down a heavy burden. He thought of how heavy many men must feel if they have not been able to pry loose all these loads that wear them down.
>
> (The Obeah Man, p. 153)

The emphasis on dedication, self-knowledge, and empathy here, as well as in the following quotation, encourages us to suggest that Khan is describing an artistic consciousness:

> You would know why Jimpy choose Zampi as his follower. The old man had seen Zampi's character change. He had watched him through long hours at the Britannia Bar, at the Scorpion Tail, wrestling with that unseen hand that plucked out melodies from his breast, plunging him deep into the hearts of other men, until he was one with them, feeling all their joy, their exhilaration, and then at times all their lonely melancholy and misery. It took all this to be an obeah man and then it took more, for it meant time and practice and resignation and sacrifice and thoughts as confusing as nightmares and more, and it meant discovery of oneself and being and not being at the same time. Being all the things that another man was, absorbing it, healing it, then purging yourself of it.
>
> (The Obeah Man, pp. 154-55)

The Obeah Man ends with the violent deaths of Massahood and Hoppie. Zampi and Zolda leave for the hills: the woman in a state of shock but wiser, and the man at peace with himself, although misunderstood by his fellowmen, and denied the social usefulness he craves. The conclusion to the novel may seem rather pessimistic and not as socially integrative as the ending of its predecessor.

But if Khan leaves us with the impression that it is only through strategic withdrawal from society that a man may be able to achieve some kind of moral life and self-knowledge, it is because the world he creates offers no other alternative. It is an ugly and self-destructive world.

It may seem perverse to link the names of Ismith Khan and George Lamming together. But there is an affinity between the Trinidadian and the Barbadian which they share with no other West Indian writer. In his concept of identity as a creative process, for example, Khan significantly anticipates Lamming who, in a talk given in 1966, said:

> A man's relation to place and time is crystallized by his acts and the history of his choices in given concrete situations. It is the process of work in all its variety which defines his spirit. This work, whether cultural or manual, is an integral part of a whole. We make this whole, and are made by it, at one and the same time. This reciprocity is constant; but it is not static; for a man, who is organically related to his tasks, is continually recreating himself. What is my identity? I live it, and at the same time recreate it. What is the West Indian identity? It is that process in which West Indians are, and will be involved, as they choose their tasks, and recreate their situations.[9]

Khan too will find no difficulty in agreeing with Lamming in his conception of the West Indian relation to the past: 'A part of our cleansing has to take the form of a backward glance, not in a state of complaint or in a state of rancour, but the backward glance as part of the need to understand.'[10] The Jumbie Bird enacts this process, and it is the creative impulse behind Lamming's most ambitious novel, Season of Adventure (1960).

It is no exaggeration to say that Season of Adventure is a classic in the literature on the problem of West Indian identity; personal, as well as cultural and national. In this novel, George Lamming brings to fruition the artistic potentiality he showed seven years earlier in his largely autobiographical fiction, In the Castle of My Skin (1953), which is more than a novel of childhood in the West Indies. In stylistic brilliance, narrative energy, and creative power, Season of Adventure surpasses all of Lamming's other works, including Water with Berries (1971), a masterpiece of concentration. In complexity and diffusion of character-relationships, no other similarly preoccupied fiction can challenge comparison with the work, not even A House for Mr. Biswas. Season of Adventure is subtle, profound, and highly imaginative; it is also a particularly difficult book that makes heavy demands on the reader, even when he understands how it works. Moreover, it does not lend itself easily to a conventional critical approach.

Essentially, Season of Adventure is a political novel; it depicts 'the failure of nationalism'[11] in the republic of San Cristobal, an imaginary West Indian island, whose history, demography, and bloody struggle for independence Lamming fictionalizes in Of Age and Innocence (1958). But within the tense socio-political situation which the novel describes, Lamming locates the story of Fola Piggot. It is Fola's gradual growth into personal and political awareness that provides the novel with its title as well as its narrative trajectory. The two concerns of the novel are not mutually exclusive; nor do they exhaust the work.

The conversation between Crim and Powell (pp. 11-20), with which Season of Adventure opens, touches upon some of the topics which Lamming develops as the novel progresses: vanity and false pride, appearance and reality, freedom and independence. But the main focus in this conscious overture is the cultural loss that has resulted since the local bourgeoisie assumes political power in San Cristobal: '"Is like how education wipe out everythin' San Cristobal got except the ceremony an' the bands. To teacher an' all who well-to-do it happen. Everythin' wipe out, leavin' only what they learn "' (p. 17). So laments Crim in anticipation of Baako, the new president of the Second Republic, in his address to the people at the end of the novel: 'The country had inherited two difficulties from its past history. Illiteracy was the burden of the poor. It was a great danger, but not greater than the danger of a derivative middle-class which, by the peculiar curriculum of their education, could easily become an active enemy to the country' (p. 362). Baako, in turn, echoes Lamming, who, in an essay on the presence of Africa in West Indian literature, says that 'the intellectual classes are still severely inhibited by the cultural rigidities of imperial indoctrination.'[12]

West Indian middle class social and cultural decadence is shown in the novel both in the manner in which the local elite ridiculously tries to ape European ways of life and, with more emphasis, in its contemptuous denigration of indigenous values, especially those with a traceable African origin. If all of this now sounds tiresomely familiar, it is necessary to remind ourselves that Season of Adventure was written in 1960, long before criticism of the West Indian middle class had become a vogue. More importantly, Lamming performs his satiric dissection of the West Indian middle class with rigorous artistic integrity. The novel is conspicuously free from the kind of clumsy rhetorical devices that Claude McKay and Frank Hercules, for example, use respectively in Banana Bottom (1933) and Where the Humming-bird Flies (1961), to arouse an emotional reaction in the reader against the same class. So completely does Lamming possess his characters that he can dispense altogether with such manipulative techniques; so thoroughly is he in control of his imaginative energies that he can rely exclusively on the authority of dramatic action to effectively sustain the burden of his social criticism. Lamming's presentation of Camillon, the young surgeon, is a perfectly good example of his method, as is his characterization of Piggot, the San Cristobal Police Commissioner, and his wife Agnes. Above all, Lamming succeeds where so many West Indian writers fail: in his portrayal of the powerful West Indian middle class, Lamming scrupulously avoids the stereotype. His middle class characters are 'real people,' carefully drawn with individual lives, human frailties and weaknesses, and with as much compassion as he shows towards the poor and underprivileged black masses whose struggle to preserve their cultural heritage is one of the central issues in the novel.

With what may seem like perversity, but is in effect a bold exploitation of the commonplace for its symbolic possibilities, Lamming dramatizes this conflict in the attitudes the classes hold towards steel band music. For the Boys of the Reserve, who play the drums, their music is all they have 'to make glad with.' It serves as a source of release from their endless social and economic frustration and, at the same time, invests their dreary lives with a sense of pride and dignity; it gives them an identity: '"A man must got somethin' that he can't let go,"' as Powell, the band-leader says, '"like how Gort hold that drum"' (p. 17). In contrast, the authorities regard the bands as crude and primitive: '"They say . . . it makes a bad impression on the outside world. . . . Now that San Cristobal is a republic an' we free, we got to keep in step with nations as such. Music must be music. Frenchman, German, any kind o' man can play piano or violin once he know how to play. It ain't make no difference where the instrument made. Piano is piano an' violin is violin. But no musician but the Boys can beat those steel drums"' (p. 315). But this reaction to the presence of the steel bands in San Cristobal goes much deeper than concern for the cultural image they create. In the music of the drums Lamming also finds an appropriate symbol to explore the meaning and relevance of Africa within the context of contemporary West Indian society. It therefore suits his purpose to link the West Indian Steel Band, a clearly local phenomenon, to 'an African heritage'[13] that even stretches back to the dawn of creation: 'It seemed this music had always been there, immortal as the origin of water swinging new soundings up from the sea's dark tomb of noise' (p. 19). It is precisely for this reason that the native bourgeoisie reacts with such violence to the bands; the rhythms of drums evoke in them a racial memory which they desperately wish to obliterate from their consciousness. To identify with the drums would imply an admission of their close bond with the black lower classes whose very existence is a constant source of shame and embarrassment to them. The proclamation to ban the drums in San Cristobal thus has absolutely nothing to do with the reasons given; rather, it is a psychologically protective manoeuvre, a conscious and concerted effort to effect 'a permanent break with the past,' and this, as Lamming sees it, can only lead to the symbolic death of the nation, as it apparently does at the end of the novel with the collapse of the Republic. Acceptance of this component of West Indian cultural legacy, on the other hand, in the spirit of humility and inquiry is vital to the development of national identity as well as to the achievement of personal integrity. It is this 'message' that is given intense dramatic expression on the personal level in the story of Fola.

As a member of the new ruling class, Fola implicitly shares its social and cultural values, and also its prejudices against the masses at the bottom. But no sooner do we enter the novel than we realize that Lamming intends to involve Fola in a process that is designed to reshape her consciousness. Her presence at the ceremony of the Souls with which the narrative begins underscores this intention. Ever since Lamming witnessed the ceremony of the dead in Haiti in 1956, 'the universal significance of certain of its themes'[14] has haunted his literary imagination. In The Pleasures of Exile (1960), for example, he makes extensive use of it in his brilliantly original interpretation of The Tempest. Similarly, in

Season of Adventure his creative imagination fertilizes the factual details of the voodoo ceremony with social, psychological, and spiritual values: 'It is not important to believe in the actual details of the ceremony. What is important is its symbolic drama; the drama of redemption; the drama of returning; the drama of cleansing for a commitment towards the future.'[15]

The ceremony affects Fola in several ways. Predictably, her initial response is one of skepticism and contempt: '"You want to suggest that I believe in all that"' (p. 27), she disdainfully asks of Charlot, her former history teacher, who has brought her to the tonelle in order to convince her of an observation he had made earlier when he saw her dance to the rhythms of the distant drums:

> Watching her dance, he was reminded of the crowd at the other end of the beach. She hadn't lost their rhythm -- sensual, vigorous, innocent in her sense of physical delight. Charlot was sure there was some hidden parallel of feeling between the girl he met three years ago and the coarse exuberant faces of the crowd which had suddenly grown hysterical in the tonelle.
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 24)

Lamming confirms the affinity that Charlot notices between Fola and the cultists: 'Social refinement had become Fola's natural atmosphere, yet she had kept the raw, unbridled certainty of instinct which tossed those women through their dance around the bamboo pole' (p. 24). Fola, of course, denies any bond with the women at the voodoo ceremony. But her strenuous denial paradoxically stems from a fear of identity: 'She wanted to leave the tonelle. Each moment of her stay seemed to increase the fear that she might not be able to escape the conversion of their prayers' (p. 34).

Later, as the ceremony boils with passion and the tension increases, Fola grows frantic with fear; her cynicism gives way to panic. And as the ceremony enters its main phase of spirit possession, terror immobilizes her: 'If Fola had been sure of her strength she would have run away; but fear made her weak. If she tried to move, they would think their prayers had worked. Her departure would have been proof of her failure to deny what they had seen' (pp. 40-41). At the end of the ceremony, the Houngan, overcome by pleasure at the sight of his guests, exceeds his power and invites Fola into the forbidden sanctum of the tonelle. Fearful that she will betray her 'new consciousness,' Fola reluctantly accompanies him: 'She walked beside him like someone in a trance. The earth stirred like water under her feet. Through a cloud of shadows in the door she saw the candles burn pale faces under a black tomb of bamboo' (p. 41). What transpires inside this sacred room is a terrifying experience for the already thoroughly confused and bewildered girl:

> Fola saw the Houngan approach, but she couldn't tell what he was demanding of her. It was impossible to read any meaning in his face. He had taken the axe from the table. He held it out so that the point came near her chin. The flames burnt like spears over the blade. He wanted her to take the axe, but she was slow to understand his gesture. Fola proffered her hand, and something horrible and more solid than gin was opening her throat. Fola watched her hand; yet saw that it wasn't hers; and could not recall where she had seen that hand; from what ancient or forgotten kingdom of time past had she seen that hand! But this foreign hand emerging from her body was in her memory. It was real; yet totally beyond her recollection of any recent time.
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 44)

The shock of this 'fearful encounter of her forgotten self' creates in Fola an intense need to resurrect a past that has been long dead to her memory. Previously, she 'had never known the tendency to make that backward glance' (p. 120). Now, for the first time, she begins to question the authenticity of her existence, and the urge to discover who she is, becomes her primary objective. In the illness that confines her to bed, in the wake of her ordeal at the tonelle, Fola summons up images from her past in an attempt to solve the mystery of her compulsive participation in the dreaded rites of the voodoo ceremony. With remarkable artistic skill, ease, and clarity, Lamming telescopes the world of Fola's childhood and adolescence into vivid focus. The use of pictures as a means into the past is an archetypal literary device that has now become easily recognizable, if not stale. But Lamming vitalizes the technique in such a way as to make it seem almost innovative. Fola moves from one frame to another in rapid succession, but the transition is never abrupt or obtrusive. The memories they evoke smoothly dovetail to give continuity and coherence to her imaginative journey into the past. It is essential to note that her retrospection is not in the nature of a conventional flashback as it is in Book II of The Mimic Men: Fola examines her past in relation to her recent experience at the tonelle. The different worlds of time converge on her feverish consciousness as she tries to grapple with the sudden upheaval in her personal life.

In this struggle, Lamming casts Charlot in a catalytic role; it was at his insistence, as Fola now recalls, that she had gone to the tonelle: 'Fola could hear his voice uttering its familiar theme about the need for roots; the need for her to return to a world of feeling which the tonelle implied' (p. 92). But, unknown to Fola, and a remarkable instance of Lamming's natural economy, it was not merely an anthropological curiosity that led her lover to take her to the voodoo ceremony of African origin. Lamming allows us to see that Charlot also had a personal stake in the drama of redemption that the ceremony enacts: 'It helped him to return to the facts of his own inheritance. He wanted to punish Fola for walking blindly into the hell he could not now escape' (p. 39). Still, Charlot could not begin to imagine the complex emotional and psychological impact the rites have on the middle class West Indian girl. His failure to identify sympathetically with her inner turmoil, even to understand the consequences of his action, whatever the motivation, finds its correspondence in the difference between the attitudes of his American friends to Europe and her response to the tonelle. 'Why could his American friends return to embrace their world of monuments and important graves?' is the question that tortures Fola in her search for an explanation of her ambivalence to the tonelle. The answer, when it comes, emerges harsh and clear, and with the strength of the author's personal conviction:

> It was because, for Liza and herself it was because their relation to the tonelle was far more personal than any monument could ever be to an American in his mad pursuit of origins. Personal and near. Nearer than any famous grave that lay before Charlot's eyes. Her relation to the tonelle was near and more personal since the conditions of her life today, the conditions of Liza's life in this very moment, could recall a departure that was near and tangible: the departure of those slaves who had started the serpent cult which the drums in their dumb eloquence had sought to resurrect.
>
> The Americans took pleasure in their past because they were descended from men whose migration was a freely

> chosen act. They were descended from a history that was recorded, a history which was wholly contained in their own way of looking at the world. 'But my return! The return that might also come to perplex Liza!' This was more personal since it was a commercial deportation which had shaped her relations to the _tonelle_.
>
> (_Season of Adventure_, p. 93)

But if this difference in the nature of their historical dislocation explains the opposite attitudes the white American and black West Indian hold towards their respective past, it is not a question of race, as Fola suddenly discovers in her remorseless self-analysis; rather, it is the peculiar bias of her colonial education that accounts for her ignorance and fear of her African heritage, her aesthetic denial of blackness, and her rejection of the world of the Reserve: 'Fola looked at her own hands brown as sugar in the light, and the words were screaming through her fever: it was not race, I swear it was not race, it was not race, repeat, repeat, not race, it is not race. It was and is the contagious blackmail of slavery working a crime on every skin that comes too thick with colour. Not race, but the blackmail of slavery; and near, _too near in time to be forgotten by the Americans, Charlot, or me_' (p. 94).

It is, of course, ironic that Lamming should choose Charlot to introduce Fola to the world of the _tonelle_; it was his cultural history that had conditioned him, and through him, the girl, to despise her native culture: 'History was the udder Charlot had taught her mind to suckle at. Now it was through his tutelage, through a tutelage foreign to San Cristobal, that Fola had returned to the _tonelle_' (p. 94). But the privilege Lamming grants Charlot is ephemeral. As Fola continues her journey back in time, Charlot increasingly recedes from her into the background and the frenzied dance of little LIza in the tonelle begins to work a deeper influence on her memory:

> In the sputter of candlelight that ringed Lady Carol's face, she could see Liza in a frenzy of rhythm that tossed her round the bamboo pole. The ceremony could not distort her senses here. The dead voice wailing for its mother from the tent had lost its power to deceive. But the child was real. The ceremony was a soil from which the child would grow, natural and sure as plants. When she's my age, Fola thought, Liza might feel no need to argue with the dead.
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 75)

This ascendancy of Liza over Charlot in Fola's reminiscence is of crucial importance in the structure of her awareness. To begin with, it serves to free the girl from her emotional and psychological dependence on Charlot, whose influence on her she now interprets as evidence of her vulnerability. More significantly, the gradual realization that it is Liza and her dance, and not Charlot and his thesis, which trigger her mnemonic imagination testifies that her experience at the tonelle besieges her consciousness at a level too deep to ignore. For if Charlot finds in Fola a perfect example of his own deracination, Fola discovers in Liza a unity and wholeness that she lacks. Lamming implies that the reason for this difference between Fola and Liza lies in the quality of their relation to the tonelle. The precocious child from the Reserve identifies fully and instinctively with the world of the tonelle; the middle class girl acknowledges the tonelle equivocally: 'Part-product of that world, still living under the shadow of its past disfigurement, all her emotions had sprung from a nervous caution to accept it as her root, her natural gift of legacies. Fear was the honest and ignorant instinct she had felt in the tonelle. Her shame, like that of all San Cristobal, was unavoidable' (p. 94).

To make Fola realize that her fear and shame of her African heritage are the direct effects of her education and upbringing is the dramatic responsibility Lamming assumes in Season of Adventure. To this end, Lamming contrives to involve Fola with both her worlds, at a level where she can recognize their intrinsic worth and, through a freely chosen act, make her commitment to the future. This contrivance does not appear obtrusive, since the character has already come to the realization, however vague, during the course of her reflection on her experience at the ceremony of the souls that her lack of personal integrity stems from her ambiguous relationship with the two worlds she straddles: an ambiguity that begins at birth. Fola has no clear natural origin; the identity of her father, who could be either African or European, is a mystery even to her mother. Her search for her father, on which the narrative now inexorably turns, thus becomes in essence a dramatic search for self-identity. The need to discover the truth of her heredity steadily grows into an obsession. Alone and in the disguise of a boy, Fola roams the outskirts of the Reserve. At home she confounds both Piggott and Agnes with her alternation between moody silence and relentless questions about her father. When Piggott tries, nervously but with good intention, to deflect the line of her enquiries, Fola promptly and petulantly forestalls him in dialect:

'"Don't try to make me feel good. . . . It ain't good I want to feel. I had enough of that. Is only knowing I want to feel, Piggy, is only knowing I want to feel. I ain't ready for anything now but knowing, just knowing"' (p. 126). It is this craving to know who her real father is that moves her, although not vindictively, to deny Piggott the paternity he wants so badly: '"You're not my father, not you."' It is a cruel denial that wounds Piggott deeply. Lamming compassionately describes the poignancy of the moment: 'His eyes were wet. In the solitude of his last wish, Piggott was surrounded by the sad and familiar regret his life had always known. He was not her father, he was no one's father. His wish had grown dormant. Piggott could feel his last claim, like the weight of some personal inadequacy, painfully dissolve within him' (p. 127). Later, this rupture in the relationship of reciprocal affection that Fola and Piggott had strangely shared widens into a chasm when the Commissioner explodes in primitive fury against his step-daughter who, as it then seems to him, will never fulfil his dream of a Fola 'distinct, separate and pure, like the sky.'

But it is for her mother that Fola reserves the full force of her resentment. Fola has never been close to Agnes. Now her suspicion that her father is not dead, as she was made to believe, only serves to worsen an already tenuous relationship that soon crumbles when her irrational, implacable hostility to Agnes erupts in a rage that reduces the older woman to shreds of humiliation and tears of impotence: 'Agnes was crying. She couldn't name the feeling which had reduced her to this state of absolute impotence.

She felt empty and pointless as the air. She tried to move, but this body was no longer hers. It had swindled her of feeling, boycotted all her strength. Her body was a dead heap of rags that covered nothing. It had left her nothing but water' (p. 153). In sharp contrast to the sense of helplessness that Agnes experiences in this brutal encounter with her daughter, Fola seems to achieve a kind of reckless freedom that Lamming couches in language that clearly suggests that the girl is now ready to cast off the old husk of her life, to break out of her purgatory and make the 'backward glance,' which only the dead or the living who are free can accomplish:

> Her rage had given her an impossible strength; freed her from any loyalty. She wanted to be a traitor in the name of some original truth. Fola wanted to outstrip the wind in an obstinate pursuit of something she had to know. She wanted to stand with a weight that would make the stones crumble under her feet. She could resist any danger with this passion. She was *beyond* error; she was *beyond* fear; she was *beyond* shame; *beyond*, *beyond*, *beyond*.
>
> Fola was mad with the need to do, because she was *beyond*; taken *beyond* this moment by the nameless futures which were knocking in her head. Like the dead souls in the *tonelle*, Fola was *beyond* her past. She was free; dead to the accident of her past, dead and free. Fola was a freedom which now reached *beyond* the grave, *beyond* the sky. Dead and free on her eighteenth birthday.
>
> (*Season of Adventure*, p. 154)

Driven by this terrible sense of freedom, Fola renews her search for her father with remorseless intensity. Careless of her own personal safety and reputation, Fola throws caution to the wind: she strays around the maternity hall; and is frequently seen at the Moon Glow brothel in the scum section of the city. Predictably, indeed inevitably, in the loneliness and futility that inhere in her wandering search, Fola begins to lose her capacity to feel. Emotional atrophy soon sets in on her, and a morbid desire for self-degradation measures the degree of her psychological deterioration. Ironically, it is Camillon, the arrogant little doctor of impeccable standards, who unwittingly animates Fola, and infuses her search with a definite purpose. Camillon's cold and cruel dismissal of the prostitute, who has come to his clinic for an abortion, strikes a responsive chord in Fola and sharpens her awareness of her ambiguous identity: 'I am Fola and other than Fola, meaning bastard: and other than, and other than, outside and other than' (p. 174). From this point, Fola devotes all her energies to prove that she is free; 'beyond and other than.' Revenge against the world, which has systematically conspired to imprison her in its own image, consumes her imagination: 'She was going to sabotage everything which made for their knowledge. She would be active and free from the outside, active and free over their knowledge which no one can deny her. People had moved about her, feeling no need to pay attention. But Fola was going to surprise their knowledge with another Fola; Fola and other than' (p. 175). It is in keeping with this determination to shock her friends and families with an image of herself that will undermine the certainty of their knowledge of her, that Fola deliberately fabricates a grotesque story of her kidnap and rape. It is ironic that the villain she chooses to play the lead role in her fantasy is no other than Powell, the man who later abortively attempts to deprive her of more than her virginity.

But if Fola uses Powell to further her scheme of vengeance, it is Chiki, the painter from the Reserve, who helps her to realize her true self. Chiki does not make his appearance until quite late in the novel, although his presence is strongly felt from the very beginning. In 'Part Two: The Revolt of the Drums,' Chiki shares the focus with Fola. Dr. Ramchand notices in the presentation of the artist an 'autobiographical strain.'[16] But this aspect of the character is only incidental to his dramatic role in the novel. Chiki gives intensity and resonance to Fola's dilemma. Like Fola, Chiki straddles two worlds: 'Born under the spell of gods he cannot call his own, baptised in a bible which has always ruled him from his Christian infancy; these divinities collide and fuse and contradict: in conflict at one point, breeding a harmony at the next. They are the paradox which feeds his life, the mystery his hand has sought in line and colour to unravel' (p. 188). But for some time Chiki has been unable to transcribe his ideas on canvas. The conflict which his dual cultural heritage engenders in him confuses his mind and stifles the flow of his creative inspiration. Chiki's failure to capture the emotional possibilities which the rhythms of the drums express torments him. At the end of the novel, Lamming writes his artistic demise:

> He does not go any longer to the little cave he used to call his home. The canvases wait, empty and idle as his brush which begs him to come back; shouts aloud how that gift for movement in colour and line is still alive. The little cave begs him not to forget; answer and not forget the oldest need his life has known. But he never goes as though he were finished with canvas, brush and all. Sometimes he sits and cries like a child, forgetful that everyone is seeing. He cries because he is convinced

> that he will never paint again. Chiki will not paint because he thinks he is a man imprisoned in his paradox for all time: the paradox of what he is and what he cannot do. For Chiki is still obsessed with the failure of his hands to tell in paint the magic of that sound when the drums came sailing home. No conspiracy of line or colour, he thinks, will ever fix that sound on the canvases which beg him to come back; beg him answer and not forget the oldest need his life has known. But he will not go.
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 366)

To this man, for whom the ceremony of the souls is an example of the backward glance, Fola is naturally drawn. The structure of the novel insists upon their eventual meeting. Lamming makes their first encounter a confrontation of worlds and an occasion for the mutual recognition of inner human realities. Chiki evokes a range of emotions in Fola. Fear and revulsion at his physical repulsiveness quickly yield to a feeling of identity: 'In the disfigured landscape of this man's face, she had seen her own bastard origin. . . . As she watched Chiki, her phrase, and other than was reaching to extend its meaning. The phrase and other than had conquered fresh territory; and the territory was Chiki's ugliness. Like the birth of the word, bastard, in her mind; ugliness had acquired a conception that was divine. The man whose hatred she could almost touch was no longer the painter, Chiki. It was Chiki beyond any summit Fola could attain. He became Chiki, beyond and other than' (p. 218). Fola, in turn, triggers in Chiki a rage that seems to correspond in excess to her own self-destructive reaction to her failure to find her father. The painter from the Reserve explodes when Fola tries to enlist his help. But his animosity is directed not so much against her as a person as it is against her as a representative of her class. Much to his surprise, Fola endures his obvious attempts to humiliate her. So when Fola remains, her courage softens him, and his anger and hatred subside.

The immediate outcome of this ease in tension is the growth of a relationship that effects dramatic changes in the lives of both Fola and Chiki. In Fola's company, Chiki seems to come alive. The girl revives his urge to paint and brings a measure of peace to his troubled soul. In the innocence of her appeal, Chiki comes to see 'his prejudice as his greatest loss.' His affection for Fola grows with each visit she makes to his little cave. Chiki, in turn, exercises an even greater influence on Fola. In the short time that Fola knows Chiki, she grows in self-knowledge. Chiki forces her to examine the world of privilege in which she grew up. Fola does so, and with a blinding clarity of perception, she comes to see its philistinism, its spurious values, its crass materialism: 'Lady Carol would celebrate something or the other this week-end; the Vice President would follow a fortnight later; and finally her mother would crown the season with her unique example. From home to home, from promise to promise, generosity revolved like an epidemic which knew the infirmities that qualified for dying. Spending was a contagion that travelled like the gracious noises of approval from mouth to secretive mouth and crooked ear' (p. 245). In the still of the night, Fola comes to realize exactly what these families represent:

> Thick as the night itself, she could see that waste: first nights in some tropical substitute for furs at the republic's freedom theatre, for culture like freedom had arrived to share its own legacy; the intellectual seances that increased with each new federal committee, artists' salons, and the smart, sophisticated circles that had started, with logic and some learning, to demand the restoration of an active faith in the Christian certainty of each man's temporal defeat.
>
> Week after fortnight and month from the year of Independence, they met for circle and seance: the whole man-fabricated tomb of getting together when words came plentiful as dirt. The young and the old, according to their fashions of hope or despair; they were there, simply there, a self-propelled circus of talking animals deprived of their original voices: a frozen weight that could not stir without the touch of money, without the miraculous grace of metal and common Christmas paper
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 246)

With this growing awareness of the pretentiousness of the class to which she belongs, Fola determines to 'sever all loyalties from the past.' From now on she decides 'to fight Piggott, her mother and the families; and not in argument, not with words in defence of Chiki and the Forest Reserve. She was going to fight them with the details of her life from day to day, and on their own ground. She was going to wage her war in the sanctuary of the Maraval hills, and in the sacred residences which freedom had lately named Federal Drive' (p. 245). With this resolution of open defiance comes a sudden change in the meaning and purpose of her search for her father. Fola is 'no longer so eager to know who he was or what happened to him. Her enthusiasm had taken a new turn. She wanted to find him in order to see what would happen to those who had deprived her of this knowledge' (p. 246). More significantly, Fola's journey into the past culminates in a kind of personal purgation that represents the penultimate stage in her voyage of self-discovery. So deeply are we involved in the process that it is possible to miss the subtle way in which Lamming modifies the importance of the tonelle in this process. Early in the novel, Lamming uses the ceremony of the dead to launch Fola into her season of adventure; now he presents us with a girl whose growth in awareness enables her to perceive the difference that separates her from the souls in their watery grave. Her unique privilege over the souls, Fola realizes, lies in the obvious fact that she is 'alive,' whereas they are dead; consequently, she can choose and shape her future from the perspective of her 'backward glance'; the souls, on the other hand, cannot: their dialogue with the living only serves as a prelude to their release from the waters of purgatory; it does not allow them a choice of a future: 'Memory was their last and only privilege. They could not leap beyond themselves, beyond the moment their own story had ended' (p. 246). This power to order her destiny also provides Fola with an advantage over the smug and self-satisfied members of her class, whose refusal to make the 'backward glance' imprisons them in a condition even worse than that of the dead souls, who are at least able to negotiate their freedom. The 'decrepit skeletons' of Federal Drive, as Fola describes them, are without any hope of redemption, 'polluting the live air with wave upon wave of their corpse breathing' (p. 247).

The strength of a conversion, however, lies entirely in its capacity to endure under the pressure of challenge. Fola privately affirms that she is free and alive. But there is no witness to the transformation that has taken shape in her consciousness. Even nature, which is usually made to share in such moments of discovery in literature, is characterized as totally indifferent: 'The sea burnt dully: a quiet, yellow haze that fell from the lamps and trickled towards the pier' (p. 247). In the scene that immediately follows, Lamming provides Fola with the opportunity to give dramatic and public expression to her 'private vision.' It is a scene of 'police brutality' (to use a contemporary cliche that is no exaggeration in this case) that Fola witnesses in the background. Piggott and his men have come to the Reserve on the pretext of investigating the murder of Vice President Raymond; in reality, they are on a mission of revenge. As Fola watches from the deep shadows besides the pond where she stands, the two worlds she now inhabits wage war in her head:

> Veronica was wishing her not to move. The face of Raymond's corpse lay neutral under its casket of stale water. But the other face, the face she saw as Fola _and other than_, was swelling to the size of a sea. It reflected Chiki's blood which was screaming its first accusation into Fola's ears: 'If you don't go before they've taken him away, it means you have refused.'
>
> (_Season of Adventure_, p. 269)

Agonisingly torn between her allegiance to Veronica and Raymond and her fidelity to Chiki and her new awareness, Fola momentarily takes refuge in the 'treacherous safety of the past.' But no sooner does she do this than she begins to see her choice as an act of betrayal that returns her to the condition from which her season of adventure has done so much to release her:

> Now Fola saw herself no different from her mother and Piggott, except that she would be ruined for ever in her own eyes. Like the dead souls that could not trespass beyond their recorded lives, she had cut herself off from her own future. Her faith was false, more poisonous than the power of metal and Christmas paper with which the families had purchased their privilege in San Cristobal. She had renounced her right to be a part of that live promise which had made her feel alive. Alive and other than a corpse. Integrity was the word which now stirred in Fola's ears. It pushed her like a hand into the light where she could see herself, less honest than her mother, more derelict than the dead, more dumb than Raymond's corpse. Chiki was a gift bestowed upon her by mistake. If, in this moment, the bayonets had punctured his live heart to death, that would be the end of her adventure. His absence would be the end of live promises, the end of her need to invent and leap beyond her past. Every moment of her life would remind her of a future that had died at birth, like the rotting foetus in that woman's womb: the woman whose cry could never reach Camillon's dignity.
>
> (Season of Adventure, p. 270)

The authority of personal conscience prevails. Fola crosses the pond, which is both actual and symbolic, and rescues the men of the Reserve from the terrible vengeance of Piggott, and in the process triumphantly affirms her freedom.

In the final movement of the novel, Fola, now 'free and alive,' recedes in the background, and the political theme moves into prominence. The transition is smoothly effected. Fola's declaration that it was her 'father' who killed Raymond throws the Republic in a mass confusion. The frenzied search for a man whose existence is an invention of expediency, 'magnificently comic'[17] as it is, has a serious side to it no less: the way the face on the posture haunts the imagination of everyone symbolizes the urgency with which each man feels the need to discover the truth of his own origin. More impressive, though, is the imaginative brilliance with which Lamming captures the atmosphere of fear that grips the nation. Men with felonious records seek cover; men who remotely resemble the portrait go into hiding; indeed, every man, in whom the potential criminal lurks, shudders. The ominous silence of the drums, the sudden swarm of sandflies, the destruction of the tonelle by fire, the apprehensive watchfulness of the families at Federal Drive; the terror of the Houngan in flight from a troubled conscience, all generate an air of expectancy and doom. Against this high tension, the quiet fall of the First Republic and its succession by the Second under the presidency of Dr. Kofi James-Williams Baako must necessarily seem anti-climactic, especially after the triumph of the Bands: 'It is two months today since San Cristobal returned Jack o' Lantern to his grave. But this morning the First Republic gave way officially to the Second. The drums did not play; there were no fireworks. The ceremony happened like a wedding that has never been announced. It was nervous, quiet, briefly reported in the national press' (p. 361).

In his address to the people, Baako notes several difficulties which the country has to solve, not least among which is the problem of language: 'It was language which caused the First Republic to fall. And the Second would suffer the same fate; the Second and the Third, unless they tried to find a language which was no less immediate than the language of the Drums' (p. 363). The new President concludes that 'it is language which every nation needs if its promises and its myths are to become a fact.' Baako's speech sums up the vision of the novel, which could be paraphrased in this way: the creative renewal of the West Indies lies in the fusion of appropriate elements of the various cultures in a culture distinctly West Indian, a synthesis that includes the language and idiom of the people, their beliefs and rituals, music and myths, rites and ceremonies. Whether Baako will succeed in achieving political and social justice for all remains to be seen. But at the end of the novel, the signs do not augur well for the future: 'The women laugh; but it is not the old, loud sparkle of delight. . . . The drums have not ceased to play; but their call is not the same. Their stride is less assured as though they have forgotten the speed and splendour with which they used to race their rhythms to the sky' (pp. 365-66). Perhaps it is just the strain of the recent season of adventure; but if we read Water With Berries (1971) carefully, we will see that San Cristobal is once more in trouble. Fola reappears once in this work briefly as a member of a secret revolutionary group dedicated to the overthrow of the Republic. Significantly, she goes under the code name 'Forest Reserve.'

Season of Adventure is a major West Indian novel; indeed, it is a work that easily ranks among the best in modern fiction. It has solidity and amplitude, a style that is lyrically graceful, clear, and precise, even if it sometimes distracts from the narrative, and occasionally gets heavy. These virtues, however, should not blind us to its faults. The main weakness of the novel, paradoxically, derives from its particular strength. Lamming is a self-conscious, highly sensitive craftsman, who generally shapes and organizes his material with immense skill and control. Every so often, though, his remarkably keen intelligence and intense preoccupation with the resources and expressive possibilities of language worry an issue to death. Similarly, his earnestness to render the truth of human experience with as much fullness as possible often results in an excess of analysis that swallows up the moment and slows down the progress of the action. The first eight pages of Chapter XVI, in which Lamming feels compelled to tell us about Powell's scramble for knowledge when 'he was old enough to be a father: that is eighteen or nineteen in the Forest Reserve' makes absolutely no difference to our response to the character; nor does the implied author's assumption of personal responsibility for Powell's criminal acts. When all this has been said, Season of Adventure remains a highly experimental novel, and truly an artistic adventure.

Lamming's use of the ceremony of the Souls to launch Fola into a search for her identity is but only one way to make 'the backward glance'; another is to make the journey to the land of ancestral origin in person. Two West Indian writers, Denis Williams in Other Leopards (1963) and Oscar Dathorne in The Scholar-man (1964), employ this strategy; they send their respective protagonists, Froad and Adam Questus, to Africa. A third, Oliver Jackman, does the same, only in this instance Africa forms the second leg of the odyssey of the hero of his novel, Saw the House in Half (1974). Dacasta Payne, a Barbadian, begins his quest for cultural identification in Europe, moves to Africa, and then finally to the West Indies.

In the 'Note' from the author to the editor which prefaces the book, Jackman writes:

> . . . I don't really see how I can explain to the reader in a brief note all the images and symbols that I see in the verse of the Barbadian folksong from which the title comes:
> "Saw the house in half
> And give me the chamber part."
> It is my idea that West Indians still live in a half-house, and that half of that half is African and the other European. "The chamber part": that's the comfortable part; Dacasta Payne thinks at the beginning that the European part is the chamber part, then he thinks that maybe the African part is the chamber part; finally he goes back to the West Indies; is that the chamber part? Now how the hell does one explain that to the reader? Let him figure it out, I say, and I hope you agree.

From the conclusion of the novel, Jackman leaves us with the impression that the cultural identity of the West Indian lies in the judicious assimilation of his double cultural heritage. The chimerical Payne emerges at the end of the novel as an 'English calypsonian' who has roots in the old tradition: 'The boy brand new, but you can see the old pattern coming out' (p. 333), and his new calypso promises to take the country by storm:

> The wit and rhythm and the dipping melody had sharpened and sweetened our awareness of the poetry of our daily existence; and the disrespect for what we still considered, deep in our hearts, "the white man's law" was now codified and slotted precisely and unforgettably into our consciousness, and it was Beguiler who had done it for us. For months -- perhaps for years -- to come we would be singing this song, or remembering snatches of it; without question this was the song we would be calling for from the steel bands on Jouvert Monday morning when, exerting our right to possess ecstacy before death possessed us, we would make the annual march of weary triumph through the streets of town, greeting the dawn as if it was our first and might be our last.
>
> (Saw the House in Half, p. 336)

Saw the House in Half is not a successful novel. The work fails on several counts, but its main weakness is the lack of an imaginative centre. Purportedly, the central character in the book is Dacasta Payne, and it is his search for cultural roots which is the main dramatic concern. In reality, though, Payne appears in relatively few scenes in the novel. From beginning to end he remains in the background, an elusive and shadowy figure, who materializes suddenly and then disappears completely from the narrative, only to reappear again for a brief spell. In between appearances, Jackman fills up the narrative with episodes and incidents, which are expressive of the particular social milieu in which the action happens to be taking place. Like Williams and Dathorne before him, Jackman satirizes the sham and superficiality of the native and expatriate bourgeoisie in Nigeria.

Saw the House in Half is a novel rich in incidents, but it is difficult to overcome the feeling that the prodigality of invention that Jackman displays is more self-indulgence than dramatic necessity. If there is any person in the novel who engages our imagination, it is Sinclair Brathwaite, the pompous and conceited narrator. Brathwaite is an educated middle class West Indian who gives the impression that the problem of cultural dualism scarcely affects him. But the truth is that Brathwaite is a psychological victim of cultural deracination par excellence. There is no greater form of spiritual rootlessness and personal dissociation than self-deception and self-complacency in an alien culture. Jackman identifies too closely with Brathwaite even to glimpse this side of the character. Williams succeeds where Jackman fails.

Other Leopards is an unusual novel, narrated in the first person by the central character who goes mad at the end; but the lucidity with which he defines his problem at the beginning of the narrative is remarkable: 'I am a man, you see, plagued by these names, and this is their history: Lionel, the who I was, dealing with Lobo, the who I continually felt I ought to become' (p. 19). Three paragraphs later, Froad explains his need to revive the Lobo (his African self) in him and to displace the Lionel (his European image) that his education has successfully hammered into shape:

> All along, ever since I'd grown up, I'd been Lionel looking for Lobo. I'd felt I ought to become this chap, this alter ego of ancestral times that I was sure quietly slumbered behind the cultivated mask. Now on that afternoon I came consciously to sense the thing that has made this story: that not enviable state of being, the attitude of involuntary paralysis, that made them know me in Africa -- the more intelligent, that is, as the Uncommitted African.
>
> (Other Leopards, p. 20)

Ramchand comments pertinently on this overture: 'The first point to notice in this is that Williams gives up the easy possibility of leading his character from hope to dramatic disillusion.'[18] But an equally valid observation needs to be made: in locating the problem within the dichotomous consciousness of the character, Williams turns his examination of cultural dualism into a psychological exploration of the conflict.

Ironically, the country to which Froad comes with the expectation to resolve his dilemma only serves to exacerbate it. Johkara is torn by racial, cultural, and religious strifes. Although numerically superior, the Christian Negroes of Johkara are threatened with assimilation by the more militant Muslim Negroes, who regard the whole Sudanic belt of Africa as their legitimate possession by 'blood, by history, by destiny' (p. 58). They look upon the indigenous Negroes as 'black savages.' As an outsider, without any emotional stake in the struggle, Froad is importuned by both sides to assist them in their cause. There is irony in the Muslims' appeal to Froad to help them in their crusade to absorb those very natives from whom he seeks his spiritual roots. Ironical too is the hope of the Christians that Froad will support them because, as the Bishop puts it, Froad is a Christian Negro interested in the future of Africans in Africa (p. 65). Froad rejects Christianity, and wants 'no truck with the future' (p. 82). But the supreme irony is that while both factions approach Froad because he is an 'uncommitted African,' Froad is far from free, and desperately wants to be 'committed.' Indeed, it is this passionate desire to escape from the limbo of neutrality that brings Froad to Africa: 'I didn't wish to be uncommitted; I wished to be committed. . . . It's why I had come out' (p. 20). It is this need to fill the vacuum within him that eventually leads Froad to throw in his lot with the Arab North, although his little contretemps with the Christian South and his own sense of intellectual honesty help to make the decision.

However thematically functional the atmosphere of Other Leopards may be, it is fundamentally through the medium of dramatic structure that Williams enacts his artistic vision. The cast of the novel is small, but Williams economically arranges his characters in a diametrical pattern that roughly corresponds to the dualism of identity that exists antipathetically within the personality of the protagonist. The effect of this precise disposition of the subsidiary characters is that Williams allows Froad to enact his struggle for integrity through his interaction with the other characters of the novel. To analyse the dramatic design of Other Leopards in this way is to accuse, by implication, Williams of a certain degree of mechanical contrivance, and although there is some truth in this, our critical awareness of any stiffness gives way to a sense of balance and symmetry.

Williams explores Froad's crisis through several sets of relationships in the novel. In the first place, there is Catherine Hughes, the Welsh girl, who loves Froad, but is unable to cope with his problem. The Lionel dimension in Froad is drawn to Catherine, but the Lobo in him recoils from her. As a result, Froad becomes embarrassingly impotent before her damp nudity: 'Try as I might I couldn't conjure up the faintest flicker. In fact the whole lower region of my body felt not there. Not numb or anything like that; just not there!' (p. 126). The same syndrome of desire and withdrawal obtains in Froad's relationship with the young Guyanese girl. Williams creates Eve as a foil to Catherine. Vibrantly sexual and imperturbably sullen and inscrutable, Eve appeals in a profound way to the ancestral presence in Froad. He associates Catherine with 'granite hillside and ruins and legends and history' (p. 96), but he evokes Eve in terms of natural and exotic imagery:

> For want of other means I liked to compare her to physical things: to the gloom on forest floors, to dark silent creek-water, to the immense black rivers of my South American home; the virginal strength of our equatorial forests. . . . From the moment I first set eyes on her I had an image of her freshly drowned in the burgundy-red water of one of our plantation rivers, among the floating, orange-coloured plums and withered leaves fallen from overhanging trees, smothered with poinsettia drifting over her body and through her black hair.
>
> (Other Leopards, pp. 90-91)

Yet Froad cannot respond to Eve. It is Lionel who now intercepts Lobo. He falters in the presence of her sexuality, and vents his frustration in perverse cruelty. Eve senses his hesitation with her, and arrives at the same conclusion as Catherine: '"All this fuss about being African only because you're really white. You're white inside and you can't man me. . . . You come to me half man and thinking I don't know"' (p. 175).

Then, there is Chief, the father of Eve, who has come to the continent some thirty years ago as a Christian missionary. Unlike Froad, Chief suffers from no lack of coherence; he identifies, perhaps in a superficial way, with both the physical and human landscapes. His contention that Zagreus could not escape his fate because the bond with his people had been broken explains his own successful integration: '"What's the use quibbling, no man can live without this link, this moral certainty. A man must live in time; it is his nature"' (p. 165). Froad respects Chief, but he resents his religious fanaticism, the extreme manifestation of which is the ostracism of his daughter for her marriage to a Muslim. The exercise of human charity and forgiveness seems to have no place in Chief's scheme of public responsibility and duty. It is on the basis of these moral qualities that Chief expects Froad to help the Christian South. Froad expresses his contempt for the sententiousness of Chief by pitching in with the enemy: 'Bugger the Chief and his certainties. Some leopards think they have no spots because they have no mirrors' (p. 88).

Froad shows this same kind of ambivalence to Hughie King, the expatriate archaeologist for whom he works as an archaeological draughtsman. Froad respects Hughie profoundly, even loves him: 'At times my feeling overflowed from mere respect into the most unself-conscious love. Especially while out in the desert for weeks on end, or times we went hunting the gazelle' (p. 82). Hughie is a monolith of patience and persistence, a man with a sharp, analytic mind, competent in his chosen field and quite resourceful in emergencies. But Hughie has one obsession: to excavate the ruins at Meroe in order to establish, indisputably, 'the ancient creativity of this Negro kingdom.' Hughie honestly believes that Froad is the man for the job, and to this end, like a recurring decimal, he ceaselessly pesters Froad to join him in the trek to Meroe, appealing to his sense of responsibility and obligation to his people (p. 102). Froad resents this pressure, especially when it takes this form of 'blackmail.' The reference to 'responsibility' and 'duty' is a sore point with Froad, as we have already seen in his reaction to Chief. Matters come to a head when Froad breaks under Hughie's constant goading, and explodes in characteristic fashion:

> 'Oh bugger that man,' I spewed. 'Don't let it get under your skin; don't for God's sake get nettled; don't get hot under the collar! What th' hell y'think? Don't let your hair down! Well, my hair's not the sort can come down; not like yours. Me, I'm not like yours -- get that? So take your beak from out my clothes, and your heart from off my beak.'
>
> (Other Leopards, p. 108)

The mimetic exaggeration and the lapse into colloquialism lend emphasis to the hysterical state to which Froad is reduced.

Froad advances two reasons for his unwillingness to go on the expedition. The first is 'a total lack of interest in the matter and a determination to have not the least truck with art-scholarship' (p. 81). Secondly, Froad claims that a concern with the past goes against his existential philosophy:

> For my part my choice has always lain with the simple present. I live in instants, you see; sensationally. That is my nature. As I believe it is with others of my race. Added to this, for personal reasons I also respect the condition of utter nescience; unlike, by the way, many of my race. I felt no responsibility for the past (bugger the past!) and wanted no truck with the future. Choice in the present was what was important to me; I didn't want that choice conditioned by obligations to past or future; I didn't want that right tampered with.
>
> (Other Leopards, p. 82)

But if this were true, if Froad lives, as he claims, only in the present, then his journey to Africa is meaningless. Froad's self-deception here is the beginning of the madness that finally overtakes him at the end of the novel. Williams allows us to see that Froad's cynical denial of any concern with the past is in fact a desperate desire to discover one.

The trip to Meroe, which Froad eventually agrees to make so that he can scientifically establish the racial identity of Queen Amanishakete with whom he emotionally identifies (see pp. 134-36), puts Williams's stance on the quest for origins into perspective. Queen Amanishakete towers before Froad in all her majesty and beauty, a figure of cruelty and destruction:

> There were the prisoners tied to her left hand, the royal sceptre in her right. She flogged a group of slaves, bunched like grapes on a branch, hanging, tied by the necks. She was cruel, gross, ugly. And awfully beautiful standing there, Egyptian-wise, profile style, body full-face, breasts bulging, pear-shaped buttocks; all the gold and all the jewellery of the museums around her neck and wrists, the atef-crown on her head. She was queen and destroyer. She knew hate and law. No trace of love and care. She was a spreading desert.
>
> She was all but the skin and sweat of Eve, myself, the Chief; we were one with her, vessels dipping into time to be filled and emptied, filled and emptied; passive. She had died and gone, yet she was still there, filling and emptying vessels. But how could that be! How could real water exist at the heart of a mirage! How was I to believe that! I wished for the words to assault those stone ears with some claim of my very own, mine, me! But time passed, wind blew, sand settled, gloom deepened, and I could think of nothing; nothing at all.
>
> (Other Leopards, p. 155)

The shock of this discovery of 'a headless past' has a traumatic effect on Froad: 'I knew now, with the relief of a criminal accepting the process of law, that I had to condemn myself. That was that! What could Hughie's measurements and contrivings mean to me, now; ever! There was no man, no brother, no Mother of Time, no people, nobody. There were only vessels; whole or broken, full or empty. At the heart of the mirage there was no water' (p. 155).

From this point in the novel, Froad begins to disintegrate. Disillusioned by the image of Amanishakete, Froad returns to

Jokhara, only to find that his relationship with Catherine has become a part of an irrevocable past. In desperation, he goes in search of Eve. His approach to her through the scavenger's route to the outside lavatory constitutes the climax of his regression: 'Here is undisguised imagery of anal re-entry to the womb of infancy which, added to the imagery of sexual withdrawal, vomit and urination that has preceded it, marks the completion of Froad's retreat from maturity.'[19] To this observation, we need only add the supplementary footnote: Froad now literally joins the file of the disposal workers, whose 'invisibility' in the dark had earlier reminded him of his own lack of substance: 'I am like the bloody scavengers; no shadow' (p. 96).

The climax of Other Leopards comes when Froad, already disillusioned by what Meroe has to offer 'to a bastard with no past, no history, no memory,' reacts with his usual display of violence to Hughie's taunts at his mercenary deal with Mohammed: he stabs Hughie in the neck with a screwdriver and, with only a jerrican of water, strikes out into the desert forest, moving deeper and deeper into the gloom, and further and further away from civilization. More as an expression of his derangement than as a measure of his attempt to deceive Hughie, in the event he is alive and in pursuit, Froad conceives an outlandish scheme to conceal his presence. First he strips and then buries his clothes; next he plasters his body with mud; and finally he climbs up a tree. It is only when Froad returns to this primordial state of existence that he seems to feel safe and secure:

> Now, having removed my body and the last traces of it, I am without context, clear. Going up this new tree . . . I am in a darkness nowhere at all. I am nothing, nowhere. This is something gained. . . . I've gone beyond sleep, I think, but not with anxiety. I am feeling, in a way, the faint beginning of perhaps triumph. Hughie has not found me; I have outwitted him. I have achieved a valuable state: a condition outside his method. It would make small difference now even if he appeared beneath this tree or found me in the broadest daylight sleeping here, since I have cast off all by which he is accustomed to recognize me.
>
> Same goes, too, for the law. No one can now expect me to make the faintest gesture towards a civilized language. I am a savage, shadowless. In my own time I can make my way back to the Fellata village. Only remains now to remove my consciousness. This I can do whenever I wish. I am free of the earth. I do not need to go down there for anything.
>
> (Other Leopards, pp. 221-22)

Williams does not tell what becomes of Froad subsequently, which leaves us with some troublesome artistic questions: How does Froad come to tell his story? Has he returned to civilization and regained his sanity? Or is Other Leopards the memoir of a madman? Or should we simply accept the first person method of narration as a convention? If these are legitimate questions to ask, and not an indication of a simplistic approach to the novel, then Williams may have blundered in his choice of point of view. At any rate, Williams's resolution to the drama of the divided self offers no comfort to an individual torn between worlds.

Other Leopards may be said to end on an extremely pessimistic note. But the knowledge that Froad gleams from the crucible of his personal experience in the Sudanese desert remains universally true, although the commentary Froad makes applies particularly to the West Indian:

> Between Europe and Africa there is this desert.
> . . . Between the white and black this mulatto divide.
> You cannot cross it, whoever you are, and remain the same.
> You change. You become, in a way, yourself mulatto --
> looking both ways. Looking back to the vertical,
> sideways to the horizontal. Backwards to the old mastery,
> sideways to the timeless mystery. Back to will and back
> to willing -- ai -- and sideways to the calling, the
> crucifying, the unspeakable-of, the reed shaken by the wind.
>
> (Other Leopards, pp. 208-09)

The 'desert' and 'mulatto' appropriately symbolize this condition of sterility, both physical and spiritual.

The similarities between Williams's novel and Dathorne's The Scholar-man have already been noted several times, but it is the difference in imaginative power and integrity that dominates the comparison which these two works invite. In Other Leopards, the various elements of the novel come together in a dynamic synthesis to give the work aesthetic wholeness. Williams concludes his work almost masochistically, but the conclusion is answerable to the logic of the narrative movement. The resolution of The Scholar-man is rhapsodic, but it is false to the entire experience the novel describes. In the analysis that follows the critical focus will fall on this aspect of the book.

The hero of Dathorne's novel is a Guyanese who has been living in London for many years. When the novel opens, Questus is shown as a man ill at ease in the claustrophobic 'darkness' of the metropolis and in need of some avenue of escape: 'He had to get away somewhere. There must be somewhere that he could go, somewhere he could breathe in the singing air and not feel stifled, where he could crush every blade of grass that rose to oppose him' (p. 8).

Ostensibly, Questus goes to Africa as a university lecturer. As the novel gets under way, a more personal motive begins to emerge: '"As a person who has grown up away from my past,"' Questus fatuously explains to another character in the novel, '"I don't know anything about myself. I know all I'm not. I'm not English. I suppose I'm not even really West Indian . . . I want to know what's what -- where I really belong"' (p. 48). It is interesting to note that in The Jumbie Bird Rahim expresses a similar sense of placelessness: '"We ain't belong to Hindustan, we ain't belong to England, we ain't belong to Trinidad . . ."' (p. 68). The difference between Rahim and Questus is the difference that makes all the difference to our response to their identical dilemmas. Rahim is introspective. He feels his alienation from deep within, and with a quiet desperation that moves us; Questus is glib; his sense of rootlessness is felt at an intellectual level.

Quests for identity usually involve a search that is both actual and symbolic. In A House for Mr. Biswas, it is for a house that means more than a physical shelter; in Season of Adventure, it is for a father, the search for whom becomes a search for personal origin. In The Scholar-man, Questus pursues a man by the name of Egor, who seems to have some peculiar hold on him. Dathorne does not elaborate on the bond that exists between the two men, except for the vague suggestion that Egor had spent some time in the West Indies and had a homosexual relationship with Questus when he was a boy. Egor does not appear in the novel as a character, only as a force to which Questus is irresistibly drawn. Because of the nebulous quality of the man, and the influence he exercises over Questus, it would not be far from the truth to say that Egor exists in the novel as a symbol rather than as a person. But what precisely he symbolizes remains a puzzle. Dathorne seems to imply that the destiny of the West Indian is somehow tied up in Egor, and that the discovery of the Englishman will free him from whatever ails him. This interpretation gains some plausibility in the final episode of the novel. Unable to find Egor, Questus returns to the village where the mad, splendid woman, whom Egor had once chosen for his bride, wallows in mud. There and then, amidst thunder, lightning and rain, Questus violently takes the woman:

> He walked towards one of the larger ant-mounds and the lightning guided him in swift, sure flashes and he saw her behind the mound, damp and naked. She smelt of fresh wet sand, of green trees in silver rain and grey damp earth and she lay on her back. Another flash of lightning again showed him her -- yes she was smooth and living in the dark, Egor's second bride. She lay with the unconcern of a child, her legs wide open, her head on the ground and her hands skywards. Something tightened in his trousers and he felt himself drawn to her splendid visions and her music and her thick thighs and her muscles which were part of the earth out of which she grew and suffered and ate.
>
> Now he heard the hawk of thunder; the drumbeat sprawled and capsized at his feet near the ground, turned his fingers to powder, as he stooped over her. He didn't know if she screamed again. He could not tell. The lightning spotlighted his coarse animal movements over her and the thunder came from her spine, the lightning from her spasms. Then the rain fell and he lay lost in this, his third baptism of mud and water; and he lay flat clutching her, feeling the shape of her huge breasts and the rain tickled his eyes and smoothed his face and the blessing of water poured down his mouth and his nostrils and the lightning itched and thunder eased and the wind blanketed them; and in the madness of that rainy moment, in the slush and the lighted dark, the wet and the testimony of thunder, he knew.
>
> (The Scholar-man, pp. 180-81)

The knowledge that Questus gleams from this experience is withheld from us,[20] and it is tempting to dismiss the whole episode as nothing more than the indulgence of the author in a piece of lurid description of 'sex on a stormy day.' But it is clear that Dathorne wants to suggest that Questus finally finds out who he really is in this orgasmic communion with a woman of the soil. The experience of the novel fights every inch of its way against such a discovery.

From the very beginning of The Scholar-man, Dathorne presents Questus as a man hopelessly estranged from the African cultural environment: 'Neither song nor singers, nor voices of the strangers who spoke a foreign language, meant anything to him' (p. 34). A few pages later, Questus himself becomes aware of his cultural alienation when he realizes that his momentary response to the ancestral comfa dance has no personal significance:

> He felt as if somehow he had been called up and felt wanting. This dance had done something to him for a moment. It had made him feel wonderful, a mad insane unreasonable wonder for a minute and then afterwards the pain, the realization that it was not his dance, that he was not really part of the dance, that the dance was life and he was dead, that the dance was past and he was present, that he was like a Bature who did not belong.
>
> (The Scholar-man, p. 55)

A Bature, in the local language, means 'European,' and throughout the novel Questus is referred to as a Bature: '"You don't know Africa. It is in your skin but not your bowels"' (p. 126). Dathorne endorses this observation in the narrative sections of the novel as well as dramatically in the relationship he develops between Questus and Helen, the daughter of the expatriate head of the English Department of the University of Nigeria. Even Questus himself comes to accept his image of a European. We see this clearly when Dathorne takes us into his consciousness as he dances with Helen at the 'European Club':

> She smiled, and he again felt that it was all right and no one mattered for at least that split second, and then they were dancing and she was close. Her breast was against his heart, and her hands nervous and damp in his own; and the music blew around their bodies, and he smelt gin on her lips when he kissed her. The music swallowed him up, made him part of the white animal world, excluding him from the primitive night outside, and told him he belonged to this. It was not like the night in the village when he was cut off from everything, when he was rejected and spewed up like a digested thing and left half-conscious in the dust. This was his world; he was stupid to think he could have belonged to any other.
>
> (The Scholar-man, p. 151)

Up until the last few pages of the novel Dathorne continues to offer proof after proof of the gulf that separates Questus from 'the African night that said things to him that he did not understand and would never understand' (p. 96). Yet, at the end of the novel, as we have shown, Dathorne leads us to believe that Questus is successful in the quest that brought him to Africa. From a Bature all the way, Questus suddenly becomes an Omowale, 'a child who has come back home.' Dathorne, I believe, falsifies the ending of The Scholar-man to satisfy public expectation.

The experiences of Froad and Questus in Africa place Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement (1960) in a new critical perspective. Ever since its appearance, the work has been consistently seen as 'a novel of exile,' and in a way it is. But there is good enough reason to see it also as a novel that deals with the West Indian problem of identity. In a sense, Escape to an Autumn Pavement is the obverse side of Other Leopards and The Scholar-man: for, while Williams and Dathorne send their protagonists to Africa in search of their ancestral roots, Salkey takes Johnnie Sobert, the hero and narrator of his novel, to England. This journey begins as a flight from Jamaican middle class pretensions but it soon turns into a tense struggle for self-realization. Interestingly enough, while both Froad and Questus try to shed their European cultural upbringing, Sobert, it seems, makes it the raison d'être for his escape to England: '"We have been fed on the Mother Country Myth. Its language. Its history. Its Civics. We feel chunks of it rubbing off us. We believe in it. We trust it. Openly, we admit we're part of it"' (p. 48). A year earlier, E.R. Braithwaite made a similar observation:

> I had grown up British in every way. Myself, my parents and my parents' parents, none of us knew or could know any other way of living, of thinking, of being; we knew no other cultural pattern, and I had never heard any of my forebears complain about being British. As a boy I was taught to appreciate English literature, poetry and prose, classical and contemporary, and it was absolutely natural for me to identify myself with the British heroes of adventure stories. . . .
>
> (To Sir, With Love, pp. 41-42)

Sobert and Braithwaite are absolutely correct: if the West Indian is at all culturally identifiable, it is certainly not with the country from which his ancestors came, whether it is India or Africa; the cultural influences which have shaped and formed him into the person he is are predominantly European. Still, it is naive of the character and the Guyanese author to presume that their strong cultural ties with England automatically confer upon them a British identity. Questus and Froad are perhaps less naive in their hopes of finding their true selves in an Africa from which they are separated by more than three hundred years and a lost language.

But it is not the process of cultural indoctrination which Sobert outlines that dominates our response to the whole melodramatic episode from which the quotation from Escape to an Autumn Pavement is taken; rather, it is the maudlin self-pity and bitter frustration that the West Indian seems to feel when he discovers that he cannot possess the artifacts of the country which he has come to regard as his home: '"I feel nothing. I feel nothing at all! And yet, I want to feel just a little something. . . . Why don't I understand and feel about things? Why don't I feel any pride and joy in them, as they say one ought to feel if you're linked?"' (pp. 48-9). It is wormwood and gall to Sobert to find '"Mother Country as a catchword is no catch"' (p. 29).

Salkey satirizes Sobert, though not in the sort of malicious way we find in the treatment of middle class figures in West Indian fiction. The narrative convention that Salkey chooses for Escape to an Autumn Pavement indicates that his artistic concern is primarily moral and psychological. By allowing Sobert to tell his own story, Salkey invites us to concentrate on Sobert as narrator and character in action. An inevitable consequence of this mode of narration is that we rely exclusively on Johnnie for narrative details, though not necessarily on his interpretation of events. In all fairness to Sobert, he does try to be objective and be frank in his reportage: he admits his own weakness and failings without excuses, and he does not attempt to justify his behaviour, which is not always admirable. Essentially, Sobert is severely limited in his knowledge of his own nature and motive. If this lack brings him in line with our conception of modern man, it also gives rise to much dramatic irony. We can say the same for Froad and Other Leopards. But there is one crucial difference: while Williams does not seem fully aware of the ironic dimension of his work, Salkey, like Achebe in A Man of the People (1966), uses the literary device to guide the reader to a proper interpretation of the experience of the novel; for example, it is Johnnie, and not Salkey, who is blind to the ironic contradiction in the character's desire to escape from the bogus world of middle class Jamaica and his disappointment at not being able to feel like an Englishman.

If there is a key to the interpretation of Escape to an Autumn Pavement, it is to be found in the epigraph to A Quality of Violence: 'They change their climate, not their soul, who run beyond the sea.' The entire superstructure of the novel rests on the commonsensical observation that it requires more than a change in landscape for an individual to achieve freedom from the collective social morality that has shaped his personality. To make us see that Sobert cannot escape the effects of his moral upbringing by mere geographical relocation is the creative task that Salkey accepts and seeks to discharge in Escape to an Autumn Pavement.

Mrs. Sobert is the moral touchstone in Johnnie's life. She does not appear in the book as an active character, only as a moral force that exerts a tremendous influence in the way Johnnie acts and behaves. In the oblique manner in which Salkey presents her, Mrs. Sobert comes through as a woman of high moral sense. The main stress in her letters to her son is on moral rectitude, the necessity for discipline, moderation, and integrity: 'I do hope you'll not let me down over there in any way. For the sake of all that's good and holy, please remember that you've had more than most. You know what I mean, don't you? Therefore, your behaviour ought to be rational and calm. Don't be blinded by the bright lights. Their enticements are just the same as those you've experienced at home' (p. 51). On one of the rare occasions when Johnnie takes a backward glance at his early life, we learn precisely what Mrs. Sobert means: 'The life of endless respectable pursuits and conventional patterns of behaviour' (p. 77). Although Johnnie does not come outright and say it, we soon realize that his mawkish criticism of the ethos of middle class Jamaica includes a criticism of his own family: '"There are a few families who're aspiring to a sort of middle-class position. In some weird way, they are ready for it. They have the necessary trappings, the deceitfulness, the narrowness, smugness, the holier-than-thou attitudes -- all of this plus a deep-rooted working-class mentality"' (p. 47). Later, this satirical attack becomes an ironic comment on his own personal behaviour. For as much as Johnnie despises the vulgar attitudes and hypocrisy of the Jamaican middle class, he is a product of it, and in many ways embodies it. It would be hard to find a character in West Indian fiction more conscious of his social status than Johnnie Sobert is. He wears it like a badge in his insufferable arrogance, in his aloofness and self-conceit, in his priggishness, and in the tone of moral and social superiority that he assumes with the other residents who share the same shabby environment with him. But when all this has been said, it is necessary to add that to see Johnnie as all indifference and insouciance is to be taken in by his pose, which he deliberately assumes to conceal his vulnerability.

A look at an early episode in the novel will help to illustrate the conflicts that Johnnie experiences when he is faced with a situation that requires the kind of action that goes against the whole grain of his moral education. Prior to his confrontation with Trado, his landlord, Johnnie concludes that it is 'no use behaving the way my mother would want me to, responsibly and politely; the way she would be proud of; the way a little gentleman is brought up to behave. . .' (p. 20). And yet, this is precisely the way Sobert behaves while the racial bigot tramples on his dignity. Without so much as a word in self-defence, Sobert endures the humiliation and insults that Trado heaps upon him. In the end, Sobert retreats to his attic bedsitter to lick his wounds in private, with the feeble consolation that his landlord has a legitimate right to demand the rent he owes: 'Of course he's right. He's only asking for two weeks' rent. He's the lawful collector of two weeks' rent. That's all. I owe him three pounds' (p. 22). It is a hollow triumph that Sobert gains when he soon surprises Trado with the payment; the real victory belongs to his mother and her notion of bourgeois morality.

In this seemingly trivial incident, Salkey prepares us for the agonizing moments that Sobert will have in his relationships with Fiona Trado, wife of his landlord, and Dick, a fellow lodger. Driven by the need for sexual love, Sobert strikes up an affair with Fiona; at the same time, he is drawn to Dick, whose friendship with him seems to provide the kind of imaginative freedom he craves. As the novel progresses, Sobert shows an increasing preference for the company of the man and a decreasing need for Fiona. This is understandable. His friendship with Dick is easy, while his relationship with Fiona grows intolerable. A purely sensual being, Fiona only understands the language of physical communication. Sexual satisfaction in a relationship is all that matters to her. Soon Sobert begins to be stifled by her imperious demands, her inevitable presence. Yet, because she satisfies a need in him too, he cannot wholly break away from her.

Salkey complicates the situation further when he reveals that Dick is a homosexual, secretly in love with Johnnie. Dick believes that Johnnie is physically attracted to him, but does not know it because his homosexuality is latent. When Johnnie proposes that they move out of Hampstead and share a flat together, Dick needs no further proof of his suspicion and readily agrees. Sobert, on the other hand, is not quite sure of the source of his 'sympathy' for Dick. He simply sets it down as an expression of their mutual need to escape from their 'middle classery.' But his fierce insistence that his relationship with Dick is aesthetic and platonic, even before the subject is brought up, suggests that the possibility exists that his attraction to Dick may be homosexual on a subliminal level. He seems to block the idea from his mind. When, for example, both Fiona and Biddy hint at it in unmistakable terms, the insinuation completely eludes him. The remark that he is 'bloody well finished as a man' mystifies him as though it were a cryptogram.

Whatever is the nature of his relationship with Dick, it soon becomes an obsession with Sobert. The Englishman dominates his consciousness, especially when he is with Fiona. On one occasion, for example, while Fiona is in rapture after a love session, Sobert ruminates: '[S]he doesn't understand that I'm outside her; not in with her in any way. I'm away. I'm with Dick. I'm with him in a whirlwind comparison of loves, likes, dislikes, the lot' (p. 107). For a man who expects to convince us that his relationship with another man is nothing more than a healthy male companionship, Sobert does not make it easy. For Dick, who needs to know where he stands, it is pure hell. He urges Sobert to realize his nature. The whole scene in which the confrontation takes place would be comical if the issue at stake were not so serious. In the end, Johnnie realizes that he will never achieve unity and coherence of being with either Dick or Fiona: 'They have made a farce of freedom, my kind, anyway. My kind of freedom didn't function for them. It wasn't even a selfish thing. It was just non-existent. They made me know, in no uncertain manner, that truly 'whole people,' whatever that means, were tagged, always have been, pigeonholed, easily classified, easily lumped in a bundled mass, conveniently distributed to a waiting mob of diagnosticians, analysts, observers, recorders' (p. 191).

In his commentary on Escape to an Autumn Pavement, Bill Carr discusses the symbolic roles which Fiona and Dick play in Sobert's imaginative life. Carr sees Fiona as 'the disconcerting means of escape from the constricted moral world Sobert grew up in, a world, though decent in aspiration, can supply nothing to meet the urgent demands of his now isolated nature.'[21] Carr identifies Dick with Mrs. Sobert, and argues that Johnnie satisfies all his mother's moral requirements in his relationship with Dick.' There are two related flaws to this interpretation, which, however, do not invalidate the general conclusion that 'the tensions between the two relationships reflect the tensions in Johnny's home background.'[22] In the first place, Carr does not pay sufficient attention to Fiona and Dick as characters in a novel. Whatever their symbolic functions may be, they are real and vital beings. It is their irreducible human reality that first appeals to us, and to which we respond. They are not disembodied voices. Secondly, because of the rigid figurative roles Carr assigns to Fiona and Dick, the critic overlooks the responses they evoke in Sobert. While it is true that Sobert seems to be rebelling against bourgeois respectability and conventional morality by having an adulterous affair with Fiona, the character consistently associates Fiona with boring, conventional conduct, and strangulation (see p. 107). By the same token, while Dick may satisfy the stern puritanical ideal of chastity that West Indian middle classes demand, at least publicly, of its members, Sobert repeatedly identifies Dick with his desire for spiritual and moral independence.

It is of course possible to explain the effects Fiona and Dick have on Sobert in terms of his self-delusion; that is, the suffocation that Sobert says he feels when he is with Fiona derives not so much from her overwhelming sexuality as it does from his oppressive sense of moral betrayal: 'Every trip, and I lose a little more peace of mind, a little calm' (p. 111). Likewise, the 'happiness' Sobert says he finds with Dick comes from the absence of such guilt rather than from the easiness of their relationship. But it seems to me that the ironic ambiguity that surrounds Fiona and Dick is a function of their human reality as well as the means through which Salkey removes them from the deadly symbolic plane on which we may be tempted to confine them. At any rate, their ambiguity does not alter the basic vision of the novel. Sobert's vacillation between the man and the woman is not at all a loss of confidence in his sexual identity, as the blurb seems to assume; rather, it is symptomatic of his inner disorientation. Sobert's problem, as he comes to realize later, is his inability to 'live in the present,' because he does not know how 'to break from the past (p. 120). Seen from this perspective, it is of no dramatic importance whether it is Fiona or it is Dick who symbolizes the past. Nor is it essential that Salkey should clearly define the sexual identity of his hero, any more than it is necessary for Thackeray in Vanity Fair to let us know whether or not Becky is guilty of adultery. Escape to an Autumn Pavement establishes with dramatic clarity what it sets out to do: namely, to show that Sobert is tensionally drawn in two directions, a victim of contradictory impulses, the root of which lies immediately in the total determinism that his past exercises over his present life, and ultimately in his lack of a clear personal and moral identity.

Much of the evocative power of Escape to an Autumn Pavement comes from the immediacy with which we experience the action. A greater portion of the narrative is told in the present tense. Even in the third section, which is historical and retrospective, Salkey manages to maintain a perspective that is fresh and vivid. But Escape to an Autumn Pavement is not the kind of work that evokes a strong imaginative response. Written immediately after A Quality of Violence, the novel suffers in comparison. The book lacks the power and inventive energy of its predecessor, although it is a much more unified work. The narrative skein is tightly drawn. There is an occasional intrusive passage that sometimes betrays a lack of confidence by the author in his creative ability; at other times, it comes through as a self-indulgence, as on the occasion when Sobert delivers his disquisition on the colonial mentality of the West Indian middle class. On the whole, though, there is no tangential distraction, no reflective commentary. The action moves swiftly and steadily on its way to the climax.

If there is a really distressing flaw in Escape to an Autumn Pavement, it is to be found at the very end of the novel. On the last page, Sobert writes: 'I knew I had to wait. For the truth about Dick, about Fiona, about myself. About my next move. That and only that was worth waiting for: the truth about myself, and the courage and ability to recognize it when it came' (p. 208).

Our dissatisfaction with the conclusion comes not so much from the fact that Salkey does not allow Sobert to achieve the kind of catharsis that Naipaul allows Singh to achieve at the end of his imaginative reconstruction of his life in The Mimic Men (1967): 'So writing, for all its initial distortion, clarifies, and becomes a process of life' (p. 301). To come to terms with his experience has never been the purpose of Sobert's narrative. He merely intended to relate it, not as a process of self-discovery, but only as it happened. Our real disappointment stems from the sudden doubt that now assails Sobert in regard to his sexual identity. This uncertainty undermines his consistently positive assertion of his heterosexuality. More disastrously, to imply, as Salkey surely does, that the only problem that Johnnie has to reconcile himself to is his homosexuality, if and when it does become manifest, disorients the central concern of the novel. If Escape to an Autumn Pavement remains an ambiguous work, it is because Salkey could not resolve the conflict between his desire to write openly on the subject of homosexuality, which he sees as emblematic of West Indian cultural ambivalence, and his fear of public disapproval. Is it possible that Salkey too is a victim of West Indian middle class prudery?

This chapter opened with the observation that the sense of rootlessness and loss of identity, though a universal phenomenon of contemporary civilization, is a malaise that acutely affects the West Indian, because of the particular circumstances which brought him into existence. Violently uprooted from his native soil and familiar landscape, and marooned in an alien and inhospitable land, the West Indian, after more than three hundred years, is still a victim of the middle passage. He has no culture, no tradition, no language, no values of his own. His history is barren and brutal. Who he is and what he is are concerns that dominate his consciousness and, as this chapter shows, have given shape to a large body of fiction, rich in variety and vital to his self-awareness. This examination of the literature is by no means exhaustive. But the works studied do offer a wide range of imaginative responses to the theme and of the imaginatively realized possibilities open to the West Indian in his quest for self-knowledge.

The examination of Salkey's *Escape to an Autumn Pavement* in this chapter is a salutary reminder to the literary critic of the need for a full response to a work of literature if justice is to be done to it. To see the novel in the context of a search for identity restores an emphasis that has not been previously given sufficient critical attention, perhaps not even recognized. But to see the work from this perspective only is to remove the book from the stream of émigré West Indian fiction that it has helped to establish, and which has now grown in volume. West Indian experience abroad is as much a concern of West Indian writers as West Indian life at home. The next chapter takes up this aspect of West Indian writing: it concentrates only on novels which are set in Britain.

Chapter IV

Journey into Disillusion

Emigration has always been and still remains an inescapable fact of West Indian life. In his scholarly study of West Indian social history, David Lowenthal explains this phenomenon:

> The West Indies have been emigrant societies ever since European settlement. Emigration was a corollary of the absentee spirit. The yearning for Europe pervaded Creole life; for even those who lacked personal connections there regarded it as home. Not only whites went 'home'; thousands of their coloured descendants were assimilated into eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European society, never to return to the Caribbean.
>
> Europe continues to attract those who are ambitious, energetic, and impatient with, or fearful of, local conditions. Elite and middle-class West Indians regularly travel abroad for business or pleasure. To many, a first-class education still means a European education. The University of the West Indies, too elite to cater for most local needs, is not elite enough to suit some; more than half of all Commonwealth Caribbean college students attend British and North American institutions. For French West Indians, university and professional training still more frequently entails Paris.
>
> But many emigrants are less pulled toward 'home' than pushed out of the Caribbean by economic need. Since the seventeenth century hundreds of thousands perhaps millions, of West Indians have been forced out by agricultural unemployment. And emigration will remain all but inevitable as long as population growth outstrips economic development.[1]

But this is only one side of the picture; the other side concerns the actual experiences of the West Indians in their new 'home.' For if Englishmen had come to see the West Indies as a spiritual sepulchre, West Indians were soon to discover that Britain was yet another existential hell in their search for a spiritual home;

their dreams of social and economic well-being collided with the reality of a harsh climate, racial prejudice, and menial labour. It is this journey from illusion to disillusion that underlies much of the fiction that deals with the West Indian experience in England, and in Canada too.[2] Lamming's The Emigrants (1954) exemplifies this pattern par excellence.

The Emigrants evokes an ambiguous critical response both in its inclusive tragic view of the human condition and in its narrative organization. The work divides into three parts, which progressively diminish in length and deteriorate in formal cohesion. Paradoxically, this decline in the aesthetic shape of the novel contains at once its strength and weakness. On the one hand, it is possible to argue that Lamming deliberately contrives the structure of the novel to dramatize his vision of life as a disintegrative process that begins with hope, descends into despair, and ends in moral and psychological disintegration. On the other hand, it is difficult not to see the steady decay in the coherence of the novel as an increasing loss of artistic control. The episodic and fragmentary nature of the work gives substance to this impression.

Part One, 'A Voyage,' is by far the most interesting section of The Emigrants, and the reason is not hard to find. It is in this section that Lamming manages to exercise an appreciative degree of control over his rather wayward creative imagination. Setting plays a crucial role in this achievement. Like Conrad in The Nigger of the 'Narcissus' (1898), Lamming confines the initial action of the novel to the narrow ambience of a ship. But the ship is not merely a vessel that is on its way to England with miscellaneous passengers; it is a microcosm of the West Indies. Lamming deliberately draws his emigrants from various islands; and although he distinguishes them, they are not unique individuals, but representatives of the consciousnesses of their respective islands. Accordingly, we find on board the ship a wide cross-section of characters who are simply identified either by their nationality or by their characteristic social attitude. There is, for example, a character who is known simply as 'the Jamaican,' another as 'the Trinidadian,' and a third goes by the name 'the Barbadian.' Then, there is Mr. Dickson, the typical schoolmaster: aloof, pompous, and full of self-importance. There is also Miss Bis, fair in complexion, and snobbish in ~~consequence~~. Pride in her colour is the trade mark of her social class.

The voyage itself transcends its functional purpose. It is no more an oceanic interlude than the sea novels of Conrad are tales of exotic romance and perilous adventure on the high seas. On the obvious level, the voyage is a desperate flight from one reality that is familiar but oppressive to another that is unknown but holds the vague promise of 'a better break.' For those who are making the crossing, the stakes are as high as they are precarious: 'They were leaving home with no particular desire to return, and they were sailing to a country which few had known at first hand' (p. 44). But they are beginning to learn. In the tense atmosphere of the dark, where a typical council is in full session, the voice of Tornado, a former R.A.F. Serviceman, is heard above the drone of the ship's engine. Tornado begins with a reference to an article that appears in the 'Manchester Guardian' on 'House Shortage,' but quickly moves into a general description of life in London:

> . . . [I]n England nobody notice anybody else. You pass me in the street or sit next to me in the train as if I come from a next planet. If you hungry you keep it to yuhself and if you rich the same thing. Nobody ask questions and nobody give answers. You see this the minute you put foot in London. The way the houses build was that people doan' have nothing to do with one another. You can live an' die in yuh room an' the people next door never say boo to you no matter how long you inhabit that place. It ain't like home as you think. I tell you you only got to see how they houses build to see what I mean. What they call a house in London is what we see on the wharf of Port-of-Spain. Just a big building where you throw things like sugar and rum inside. The walls look hard, they nasty, at the top you see all the time smoke coming out a chimney, an' only now an' then when a curtain move back you tell yuhself somebody live in there. An' what all you here goin' learn for the first time is what it mean to live in yuh own own room alone without knowing a single soul in any of the other hundred. That is if you can get a room.
>
> (The Emigrants, pp. 75-76)

This bleak picture that Lamming allows Tornado to paint dampens the spirit of the emigrants. But as the character, Collis, observes earlier, after a similar discussion 'no one would want to turn back,' even though all the evidence points to England as a place of 'hell' (p. 52).

If Lamming envisions the transatlantic voyage as a journey that begins with an illusion that can only end in disillusion, he also conceives the voyage as a process that leads to an awareness of the necessity for a national identity within the context of a West Indian reality. Thrown together in a situation that makes personal interaction unavoidable, the islanders, long habituated to seeing themselves as insularly different, gradually begin to discover homogeneity in their historical and cultural background. The artificial barriers of colour and class, which have in the past kept them apart, are now broken down in the face of their common predicament: 'Whatever the island each may have come from, everything is crystal clear. Everybody is in flight and no one knows what he's fleeing to' (p. 52). As their consciousness of the similarity in their condition grows, their regional prejudice yields to a recognition of collective identity: 'They were a group. Those who had met and had spoken belonged to the same situation. It wasn't Jamaica or Barbados or Trinidad. It was a situation that included all the islands. They were together' (p. 78). Lamming is realistic enough to show that this unity is only circumstantial, one which dissolves as soon as the condition which gives rise to it changes. Towards the end of the journey, as England rises 'from beneath her anonymous grey to meet a sample of the men who are called her subjects and whose only certain knowledge said that to be in England was all that mattered' (pp. 106-107), their consciousness of the imminence of an alien world brings back their fear and uncertainty. On disembarkation at Plymouth, however, anticipation and response, wonder and surprise, overshadow their anxiety. As the train takes them through the industrial area, and through lush, green landscapes, Lamming registers their excitement in a graphic, racy style (see pp. 110-124).

'A Voyage' could easily be read as a novelette. The action is unified, complete, and dramatically engaging. In sharp contrast to the concentration of Part One, the middle section of The Emigrants suffers from a diffusion of intensity. To recreate the illusion of life, Lamming deliberately disperses the emigrants on their arrival in London, and then presents their individual experiences impressionistically. We move from one character to another in succession, and our knowledge of each grows incrementally with each exposure. Occasionally, some of them get together, but their meetings are usually fortuitous, and are always brief, though not necessarily inconsequential. The chance encounter of the unidentified first-person narrator of the opening pages and Lilian at a pawnbroker's, for example, tells us a great deal. But in general these microcosmic relationships, through which Lamming seeks to communicate human isolation in a strange and meaningless environment, are not woven into any kind of fabric. Consequently, the central narrative action of The Emigrants seems inchoate and desultory. Too many sources of interest compete for our attention; yet, none is substantial enough to command the whole.

London serves, if nothing else does, as a unifying agent in this section and also in Part Three, just as the ship holds together the introductory section. The symbols, however, work in diametrically opposite ways. While the ship draws the emigrants together, London drives them apart. The pervasiveness with which London is made to adversely affect the lives of the emigrants encourages us to see the city as the antagonist in the novel. Lamming does not explicitly charge the social environment as being responsible for the spiritual and moral deterioration of the landed immigrants; tactfully, he relies on the reader to make the connection. The emigrants themselves are only dimly aware of the deterministic effects of the new environment on their lives. But the impact is there all the same, and it is considerable. Less than a month after their arrival in London, the harsh and impersonal city begins to exact its toll on them, and within two years it inexorably reduces them to a spectral existence, bits of flotsam and jetsam, intensely lonely and alone, spiritually destitute, and no closer to the realization of the dream that brought them over. The England, which in their imagination, they had seen as the land of hope and glory, of promise and redemption, turns out to be a wasteland of despair and frustration.

With the possible exception of Phillips, all the characters in The Emigrants fail to realize their hopes. And even Phillips, who will graduate with a law degree, will be haunted for the rest of his life by the memory of the failure of his moral courage at the crucial moment. Collis merely drifts, and so does Dickson. As a casual worker, Collis is a walking disaster. Partly through his own incompetence and over-zealousness to succeed, but mainly through the perversity of circumstances, Collis bungles one job after another. Eventually, his rootlessness drives him into an abnormal situation in which he is required to make love to a promiscuous English girl while her impotent boy friend struggles in anguish to coax an erection. Collis survives this experiment without any psychological damage, but the fact that he agrees to go along with it in the first place shows how much his sense of human decency and dignity has atrophied. Dickson, in comparison, crumbles under a more subtle voyeuristic experience. Lured by his landlady with the promise of sex, Dickson discovers that he has been manoeuvred into nudity so that the woman and her sister can contemplate his body: 'He was lying on the divan, his clothes uncouthly thrown in one corner, and he sat up, rigid and bewildered in his vest. The women were consumed with curiosity. They devoured his body with their eyes. It disintegrated and dissolved in their stare, gradually regaining its life through the reflection in the mirror' (p. 256). The scene would be highly comical if Lamming did not make us see the moral ugliness of it. Dickson never recovers from the shock and humiliation of this experience. He becomes oculophobic:

> His life had become a perpetual struggle to avoid eyes. But he couldn't any longer endure the pressure which pursued him, the innumerable presences which were always gnawing at his existence. It seemed an eternity through which his life repeated itself, sleeping in a dungeon by day, and slipping out at night for a breath of air. He didn't mind being seen in his sleep, but after that experience with the women, which often in his sleep was revived, it was a torture to see and be seen simultaneously.
>
> (The Emigrants, p. 257)

The mention of the word 'eyes' now sends Dickson into a panic and frantic flight.

Sexual deviance measures the moral corruption of other characters as well. Queenie and Miss Bis, who now goes under the name of Una Solomon, share a lesbian relationship, until Miss Bis, in a gesture of independence and redemption, kills her lover in the aftermath of a homosexual orgy. At the end of the novel, Lamming allows Miss Bis to realize her ambition to marry a man of white complexion. But the malicious ironies with which he creates the possibility puts his animus against the character into perspective. The man Miss Bis is going to marry is no other than Frederick, the impotent Englishman, who had jilted her two years ago in the West Indies, from which she had to flee when a scurrilous calypso made her name and reputation notorious. Miss Bis does not recognize Frederick any more than he recognizes her under her new identity and dissolute appearance. The final irony is on Frederick. The English man had refused to marry Peggy, his accommodating 'mistress,' because he found out that she was a lesbian, and in deciding to marry Miss Bis, alias Una Solomon, he believes that he is rescuing her from such a degeneration, little knowing that Una was the lover of Peggy at one time. If all of this sounds confusing, it is.

In many novels, moral deterioration of the kind that Lamming portrays is often shown as the inevitable outcome of social and economic deprivation. Mais's The Hills Were Joyful Together is a good example. In The Emigrants there is no such clear correlation. The aetiology of the moral, psychological, and spiritual collapse that quickly overtakes all the characters in The Emigrants is not made to relate to the doctrine of materialistic determinism. This is not to say that the grotesquely sordid stories and the bitter sketches of frustration and despair that Lamming draws have no relation to the social environment; on the contrary, they do, and significantly too. My contention is that the world of The Emigrants, though real and specific, is also metaphorical and representative. London provides Lamming with the perfect objective correlative for his vision of the human condition. It is a dark and gloomy vision, even pessimistic in the bleak sense of existence that Lamming creates; but we need not see this as a failure of artistic honesty on the part of the author of The Emigrants. Gerald Moore seems to imply this in his observation that 'the bizarre nature' of the stories in the main body of the novel 'deepens the suspicion that the book itself is lunging off at a tangent from the real experience of England that Lamming must by this time have known.'[3] The Emigrants fails because Lamming does not transmute the stuff of experience into the art of fiction, and not because the work lacks the ring of authenticity.

In a study of West Indian literature of exile, Selvon's The Lonely Londoners (1956) falls naturally into place behind a discussion of The Emigrants. Even the titles of the works seem to invite this order. Like The Emigrants, Selvon's novel is concerned with the sorry experiences of West Indian emigrants in England. But the differences between the two novels are more instructive than their similarities. In their juxtaposition, they complement each other.

In contrast to the tragic sensibility that informs The Emigrants, The Lonely Londoners partakes deeply of that comic genius that animates A Brighter Sun (1952) and gives us such pieces as 'Brackley and the Bed' and 'Waiting for Aunty to Couch.' The Lonely Londoners is a funny novel, but it is not frivolous. The lightness of the tone hardly conceals the despair that lies at the heart of the experience the novel describes; the humour Selvon evokes touches reality too closely to remain humourous. But despite the hardships and sufferings which the characters endure, Selvon does not make them tragic victims of an alien culture. We see them as he compassionately but objectively presents them in all their petty meanness, selfishness, and parasitism as well as in their warmth and humanity, and especially in their loneliness which they seek to hide behind the façade of bombast and laughter.

London is 'a lonely, miserable city' (p. 154). So declares Moses Aloetta, the central character and narrator of The Lonely Londoners. Moses speaks with the authority of personal experience; he has been living in England for more than ten years. He also speaks for the other emigrants. London has reduced them all to a level of existence that is pitiful. The world of the novel is oppressively dreary and drab. Like Lamming in The Emigrants, Selvon does not fill his novel with grim physical details: he too shows us the destitution of his emigrants by the kind of emotional relationships they form. Sex is plentiful in the novel, but it is casual and mindless, never meaningful and vital, never spiritually regenerative. The 'spades' pursue the 'nice pieces of skin' simply to fill the desolate void in their lives, in much the same way they indulge in laughter to deflect thoughts from the ache of their loneliness. Memories of another more intimate and familiar world also help:

> "Looking at things in general life really hard for the boys in London. This is a lonely, miserable city, if it was that we didn't get together now and then to talk about things back home, we would suffer like hell. Here is not like home where you have friends all about. In the beginning you would think that is a good thing, that nobody minding your business, but after a while you want

> to get in company, you want to go to somebody house and eat a meal, you want to go on excursion to the sea, you want to go and play football and cricket. Nobody in London does really accept you. They tolerate you, yes, but you can't go in their house and eat or sit down and talk. It ain't have no sort of family life for us here."
>
> (The Lonely Londoners, pp. 154-55)

Yet, despite this feeling of alienation in London, the city strangely compels the boys to stay. This fascination that London holds over them is even a mystery to Selvon, who, towards the end of the novel, philosophically ruminates:

> What is it that a city have, that any place in the world have, that you get so much to like it you wouldn't leave it for anywhere else? What it is that would keep men although by and large, in truth and in fact, they catching their royal to make a living, staying in a cramp-up room where you have to do everything -- sleep, eat, dress, wash, cook, live. Why it is, that although they grumble about it all the time, curse the people, curse the government, say all kind of thing about this and that, why it is, that in the end, everyone cagey about saying outright that if the chance come they will go back to them green islands in the sun?
>
> (The Lonely Londoners, pp. 164-65)

This is the central ironic paradox in the novel, and it is dramatically exemplified by Moses:

> Every year he vowing to go back to Trinidad, but after the winter gone and birds sing and all the trees begin to put on leaves again, and flowers come and now and then the old sun shining, is as if life start all over again, as if it still have time, as if it still have another chance. I will wait until after the summer, the summer does really be hearts.
>
> (The Lonely Londoners, pp. 168-69)

It is the same with the other boys: during the long winter season, they yearn for the warmth and communal solidarity they knew in the West Indies. But as the cold recedes, and the promise of spring in the air sharpens their anticipation of another gloriously adventurous summer, their nostalgia evanesces. To be in England is all that matters. To begin a letter with the romantic phrase 'Last night in Trafalgar Square' compensates for all the hardships they have endured all winter long.

Selvon has written a sequel to The Lonely Londoners in Moses Ascending (1975). On the surface, as the title suggests, the novel tells of the material success that Moses has achieved since we last saw him; in reality, the work examines the nature of fiction and the processes of imaginative creation. Moses Ascending takes the form of a fictitious literary research. As a man of property now, Moses decides to gather material for his 'Memoirs.' But the notes he takes and his commentary on the difficulties he encounters in shaping his experiences into a literary form make up the novel Selvon has written.

Sequels are often disappointing, and Moses Ascending is no exception. The novel is weaker than The Lonely Londoners just as A Brighter Sun overshadows its sequel, Turn Again Tiger. Selvon has a sharp eye and ear for comic possibilities, and this acute sense never deserts him in any of his novels, not even in Moses Ascending in which he displays remarkable comic inventiveness. Naipaul may be challenged on his remark that 'Mr. Selvon's gifts may not be important, but they are precious';[4] but he isolates a central weakness in this writer when he observes that Selvon lacks 'the stamina for a full-length novel.'[5] With the exception of A Brighter Sun, his first and by far his best book to date, none of Selvon's novels reveals a high degree of artistic integration.

To find a novel in which both areas of experience, the West Indies and England, are held simultaneously within a single consciousness, we have to turn to an early novel by Jean Rhys. Voyage in the Dark (1934) tells the story of Anna Morgan, a fifth generation Creole, who was deposited in England by her English stepmother at the age of sixteen. When the novel opens, Anna is eighteen. For the past two years, she has been, and still is, a chorus girl in a theatrical company that tours all over England. Anna earns precious little to keep body and soul together. Economic hardships and the need for love, emotional as well as sexual, force Anna into a relationship with Walter Jeffries, a man almost twice her age, but comfortable. Walter is kind and generous to Anna, but his interest in her does not go very much beyond the physical. The affair, however, abruptly ends when Walter suddenly refuses to see Anna any more. It may well be that Walter decides to discontinue the liaison because he senses that Anna was becoming too emotionally dependent on him. Anna believes that she is thrown over for a young man, Vincent: '"Hell to your beloved Vincent"' (p. 99). Jean Rhys does not make it clear anywhere in the novel what is the precise nature of the relationship between the two men, but from the hints she furnishes, Anna may not be too far from the truth. At any rate, Jean Rhys is more interested in the effects of the break-up on Anna than in the reason for it:

> When he talked his eyes went away from mine and then he forced himself to look straight at me and he began to explain and I knew that he felt very strange with me and that he hated me, and it was funny sitting there and talking like that, knowing he hated me.

> I said, 'All right. Listen, will you do something for me?'
> 'Of course,' he said. 'Anything you ask.'
> I said, 'Well, will you get a taxi, please, and let's go back to your place, because I want to talk to you and I can't here.' I thought, 'I'll hang on to your knees and make you understand and then you won't be able to, you wouldn't be able to, you won't be able to.'
> He said, 'why do you ask me the only thing you know perfectly well I won't do?'
> I didn't answer. I was thinking, 'You don't know anything about me. I don't care any more.' And I didn't care any more.
> It was like letting go and falling back into water and seeing yourself grinning up through the water, your face like a mask, and seeing the bubbles coming up as if you were trying to speak from under the water. And how do you know what it's like to try to speak from under water when you're drowned?
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, pp. 97-98)

From this point in the novel, Anna begins to founder. She drifts into casual prostitution, and at the end of the novel she survives a painful abortion. But the possibility of a 'new and fresh' start that Anna contemplates is a wry commentary on the 'starting all over again, all over again . . .' (p. 188) with which she ends her narrative.

Voyage in the Dark is not just a tragic tale of a White West Indian girl who finds life in England miserable. Nor is it simply a novel of rootlessness and cultural alienation. It is all of this, and much more. Voyage in the Dark is quintessentially a study of a mind that holds two areas of experience which collide so violently in their differences that the experiencing consciousness is not always able to retain its imaginative grasp of reality: 'Sometimes it was as if I were back there and as if England were a dream. At other times England was the real thing and out there the dream, but I could never fit them together' (p. 8). But if Anna cannot reconcile the two worlds, it is her response to them as they impinge on her consciousness that Jean Rhys uses to dramatize the kind of double exile that a White West Indian experiences. Anna does not belong to England. All her life she had been taught to look upon England as her home, and had come to regard it as such until she discovers how painful it is for her to adjust to the harshness of its reality. Nor does she belong to the West Indies in which she grew up, and with which she identifies emotionally, but where she has always lived in a perpetual state of transience.

Anna had always imagined England as a pastoral country, much like the image on the picture she hangs over her bed in a shabby room in Camden Town:

> There was a little girl in a pink dress eating a large yellow biscuit studded with currants -- what they called a squashed-fly biscuit -- and a little boy in a sailor-suit, trundling a hoop, looking back over his shoulder at the little girl. There was a tidy green tree and a shiny pale-blue sky, so close that if the little girl had stretched her arm up she could have touched it.
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, p. 149)

In reality, Anna finds England dreary and monotonous: 'Everything was always so exactly alike -- that was what I could not get used to. And the cold; and the houses all exactly alike, and the streets going north, south, east, west, all exactly alike' (p. 179). As with the landscape, so it is also with the countless number of rooms in which she has slept: 'Always a high, dark wardrobe and something dirty red in the room; and through the window the feeling of a small street would come in' (p. 150). London itself has a 'dead smell' (p. 77); the people in it move like 'upholstered ghosts' (p. 97) in a colourless, mechanical existence.

Perhaps more oppressive to Anna than the pervasive dullness that confronts her at every turn is the coldness of the English climate. Anna is forever cold, even when there is a fire: 'The fire was like a painted fire; no warmth came from it. When I put my hand against my face it was very cold and my face was hot' (p. 24). It soon becomes apparent that Jean Rhys intends the cold against which Anna continually complains to function symbolically as well as in the novel.[6] The physical coldness that Anna feels, real as it is, images her condition of exile, her failure to identify with England as 'home.' On a more obvious level, Jean Rhys allows Anna to equate the cold English climate with the lack of human warmth in the people themselves. We see this clearly in the reflection that follows her remark that the lady sitting next to their table in a restaurant is 'terrifying.' Her companions laugh:

> But I was thinking that it was terrifying -- the way they look at you. So that you know that they would see you burnt alive without even turning their heads away; so that you know in yourself that they would watch you burning without ever blinking once. Their glassy eyes that don't admit anything so definite as hate. Only just that underground hope that you'll be burnt alive, tortured, where they can have a peep.
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, p. 120)

More explicitly, Jean Rhys shows this absence of human consideration in the treatment Anna receives from the other characters in the novel. Walter uses her and then ditches her when it suits him; Vincent is derisive in his dealings with her; Ethel Mathews selfishly exploits her youth and sexual attractiveness; and the anonymous doctor who removes the foetus from her womb is heard to remark, cynically: 'She'll be all right. . . . Ready to start all over again in no time, I've no doubt' (p. 187).

The sense of alienation that Anna experiences in England is of course not unique; it is the climactic discovery of all West Indians who make the journey across the sea. But Anna feels her isolation more deeply than any other character. The emigrants in The Lonely Londoners 'huddle together for emotional warmth,'[17] as they do also in Dathorne's Dumplings in the Soup (1963); in Escape to An Autumn Pavement they meet regularly to 'rap' in Larry's barber shop, where even Johnnie drops in when he feels the urge to talk. Jean Rhys's heroine is completely alone. Anna has no one to turn to, and in the intensity of her loneliness she takes refuge in her memory of another time and another place in which she was happy:

> Sometimes I would shut my eyes and pretend that the heat of the fire, or the bed-clothes drawn up round me was sun-heat; or I would pretend I was standing outside the house at home, looking down Market Street to the Bay. When there was a breeze the sea was millions of spangles; and on still days it was purple as Tyre and Sidon. Market Street smelt of the wind, but the narrow street smelt of niggers and wood-smoke and salt fishcakes fried in lard. . . . It was funny, but that was what I thought about more than anything else -- the smell of the streets and the smells of frangipani and lime juice and cinnamon and cloves, and sweets made of ginger and syrup, and incense after funerals or Corpus Christi processions, and the patients standing outside the surgery next door, and the smell of the sea-breeze and the different smell of the land-breeze.
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, pp. 7-8)

This passage, coming from the opening pages of Voyage in the Dark, is typical of the warmth and affection with which Jean Rhys allows Anna to recall her childhood and adolescence in the West Indies. There is nothing Anna likes better than to curl up in bed and let her imagination dwell on the sensuous beauty of her native island of Dominica:

> I was always dreaming about that pool, too. It was clear just beyond where the waterfall fell, but the shallow parts were very muddy. Those big white flowers that open at night grew round it. Pop-flowers, we call them. They are shaped like lilies and they smell heavy-sweet, very strong. You can smell them a long way off. Hester couldn't bear the scent, it made her faint. There were crabs under the rocks by the river. I used to splash when I bathed because of them. They have small eyes at the end of long feelers, and when you throw stones at them their shells smash and soft, white stuff bubbles out. I was always dreaming about this pool and seeing the green-brown water in my dream.
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, p. 90)

Again and again in her recollection of her life on the island, Anna comes to rest on her relationship with Francine, her childhood black friend, and on her wish to be black: 'I wanted to be black, I always wanted to be black. I was happy because Francine was there. . . . Being black is warm and gay, being white is cold and sad' (p. 31). It is this desire to belong to the world of warmth and spontaneity, which Anna associates with Francine, that intensifies her dislike for England: '"I don't like London. It's an awful place; it looks horrible sometimes. I wish I'd never come over here at all"' (p. 46). Even as Anna fondly recalls her affection for Francine, Jean Rhys makes her remember also the social and racial differences which had made it impossible for the black girl to return her love:

> When she wasn't working Francine would sit on the doorstep and I liked sitting there with her. Sometimes she told me stories, and at the start of the story she had to say 'Timm, timm,' and I had to answer 'Bois sèche.'
>
> You looked across a path, sometimes muddy when it had been raining, or dry, with open, gaping cracks as if the

> earth were thirsty, at a clump of bamboos swing in the sun or the rain. But the kitchen was horrible. There was no chimney and it was always full of charcoal-smoke.
>
> Francine was there, washing up. Her eyes red with the smoke and watering. Her face was quite wet. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and looked sideways at me. Then she said something in patois and went on washing up. But I knew that of course she disliked me too because I was white; and that I would never be able to explain to her that I hated being white.
>
> (Voyage in the Dark, pp. 71-72)

For sheer pathos and poignancy, Voyage in the Dark has no equal in West Indian fiction, except perhaps Wide Sargasso Sea (1966), in which Jean Rhys sympathetically recreates the circumstances that lead to the madness and confinement of Antoinette Cosway, wife of Rochester, in the attic of Thornfield Hall in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre (1847). In Voyage in the Dark Jean Rhys allows Anna to use her happy West Indian memories as a form of insulation in a cold and alien culture; in The Adventures of Catullus Kelly (1969), by way of contrast, Salkey shows how the English experiences of the titular character of this novel lead to his madness on his return home.

The Adventures of Catullus Kelly is a record of a single year in the life of Francis Anthony Aloyius, a Jamaican, who goes by the name of Catullus Kelly, in England. The novel was written nearly a decade after Escape to an Autumn Pavement. In the interval, Salkey wrote four juvenile novels and The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (1968), an analysis of the failure of cultural nationalism in contemporary Jamaica. It would appear also that Salkey's vision of life has grown considerably darker and anarchic. A chronological review of his mature fiction reveals that The Adventures represents the destination to which Salkey was slowly but inexorably driven; the work has no parallel in his entire oeuvre for its pessimistic view of human existence. On the thematic level, The Adventures constitutes the apogee of an artistic preoccupation with the alienation of the Jamaican intellectual from his society that Salkey began with Escape to an Autumn Pavement and continued in The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover.

Salkey calls The Adventures a 'biographical account' (p. 121) in a parenthetical note he inserts very late in the novel. This description is hardly an adequate one for a work that is more committed to revealing the moral and spiritual decadence of modern British society than in providing the history of its protagonist. Nevertheless, in defining the work as a biography, Salkey directs our attention to, and keeps faith with, the typical practice of writers of the picaresque novel, a tradition to which The Adventures ambiguously belongs. The adverbial qualification is necessary: as this discussion of the novel progresses, it will become clear that The Adventures of Catullus Kelly, like Saul Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March (1953), is not altogether a picaresque novel, although it relies largely on the picaresque form for its total organization.

The physical disposition of The Adventures gives the impression of a conscious architectural design: the main narrative is framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue, and the narrative itself is divided into four books. But unlike A House for Mr. Biswas, which has a similar framework, The Adventures hardly develops through its own internal energy. Salkey merely follows Catullus in a loose, picaresque fashion as the character rambles through London in a presumptive search for personal integrity and racial solidarity. There is no inevitability in the succession of incidents and events; they are separate, detachable, and interchangeable. The various episodes simply agglomerate; they do not cohere into a unified pattern or move steadily to a discernible climax. It is of course possible to argue that the formlessness of The Adventures is deliberate; that Salkey wanted to reflect human experience in its raw, amorphous state, the way it really happens in life. But it is now a critical commonplace that Salkey has yet to show the skill and craftsmanship that he has shown in A Quality of Violence. The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover is diffuse and digressive, and so is Come Home Malcolm Heartland (1976). In all of Salkey's novels, the creation of mood and character takes precedence over artistic shape and narrative cohesion.

The episodic structure of The Adventures does not distress the reader so much as the narrative technique that Salkey adopts in the novel. The oppressive omniscience of The Late Emancipation gives way to a rigorous journalistic objectivity in this novel. With the exception of the single instance when he breaks the fictional illusion (pp. 121-122), Salkey avoids narrative elaboration. The novel takes on a purely dramatic form.

Ordinarily, we would commend an author who exercises such objectivity. But Salkey goes too far in his economy and detachment. He strips the narrative of all details until the bare skeleton remains. We do not hear and see enough to enable us to respond fully to the experience the novel describes. Salkey demands too much from his reader; for example, only a person who has read To Sir, With Love (1959) will appreciate the satire on E.R. Braithwaite in the interlude during which Catullus serves as a supply teacher. Similarly, the reader who is not familiar with the social, political, and cultural situation from which Catullus escapes, to which he often returns in his imagination, will not derive as much imaginative rewards from The Adventures as the reader who knows West Indian history. All through the novel we crave for more background information, more amplification in the dramatic scenes, more knowledge of the central character. But to the very end of the novel, Salkey frustrates our wish, and refuses to appease our literal rage for order, continuity, and coherence.

Narrative fragmentation, however, does not necessarily mean the absence of unity. The catalogue of works of fiction that upsets this equation is endless. Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man (1952), to which The Adventures bears some resemblance, is a good example of an episodic novel with an underlying unity. As in the case with this American classic, so it is with this West Indian novel: The Adventures has an inner design that emerges from the quality of life that the novel presents. From the accumulation of fragments, Salkey manages to portray a shabby and squalid society, in which human life has atrophied morally and spiritually. It is this dismal view of life that Salkey uses to structure The Adventures of Catullus Kelly and to give the novel a value and significance beyond its lamentably thin and sometimes insufferably tedious narrative content.

Our point of entry into the world of The Adventures is Catullus Kelly, and he remains through the novel the centre of attention. Yet, Catullus remains indeterminate and protean, never fully graspable, and even more elusive than Johnnie Sobert. A great deal of our knowledge of Catullus comes from what he says and does; more though from what emerges from his consciousness; still more from the elaborate charade he plays to conceal the void in which he moves and has his being. Salkey's characterization of Catullus is dramatic and psychological; its effectiveness depends exclusively on the critical alertness of the reader, on his ability to distil behaviour from action, and, perhaps more importantly, on his awareness of human self-deception. With Catullus, Salkey takes us into the realm of the ironic.

In a sense, Catullus is a composite of Sobert and Stover. With the latter, he shares an enormous capacity for drinking and a prodigious appetite for sex; with the former, a cynicism and a sardonic sense of humour; with both, a middle class background and education, and an invincible disdain for the synthetic social and cultural values of the class to which he belongs. Catullus's resemblance to his predecessors goes even further and deeper than their common antipathy toward Jamaican bourgeois pretensions: the men are bound together by an intense spiritual need to discover some truth by which to live. But if in The Adventures of Catullus Kelly Salkey persists in his artistic concern for the sensitive Jamaican intellectual in a mindless society, it is the comic verve and buoyancy of the hero of the novel that dominate our response to the work.

Salkey sets the tone and the theme of the novel with this early description of Catullus:

> He was an enthusiastic amateur womanizer and a professional drinker. In fact, Catullus was a pig of a drinker; he drank practically anything: Scotch, rye, gin, vodka, wines, beers and even two per-cent alcoholic beverages and cordials, anybody's, anywhere and at any time. There was no stopping Catullus once he had started. He was inclined to loathe sobriety, and lived for long-drawn-out binges in any country and in any city available: Kingston, Montego Bay, Bronx, Brooklyn. He once said, 'Man, you can't talk to me about drinking. You're looking at the man who's destined to drink in two hemispheres.' Actually, his real ambition was to be able to boast one day that he had drunk his way through five continents.
>
> (The Adventures, pp. 1-2)

The flippancy of the tone here, however, need not deflect the significance of the information in the next paragraph. Salkey symbolizes the dual cultural heritage of his hero in his linguistic behaviour:

> There is something else: Catullus had a two-way Weltanschaaung: his Kingston-dialect mood, and his Standard English mood. He had romped through what he called 'dingy Brooklyn,' and had resolved to do the same in what he heard was 'foetid London,' alternating between his two moods, using one, suppressing the other, back and forth, never becoming tedious, never sacrificing originality, and always being impressive while doing so, at any rate to himself.

Like Fola in Season of Adventure, Catullus has two voices. But unlike the girl from San Cristobal, the Jamaican indulges alternately in both. The tone and rhythm of the last sentence of the quotation seem to suggest that Salkey is amused at the oscillation of the character between his two moods, and indeed he is; but he goes on in a more serious vein to say that it is not a mere expression of Catullus's linguistic versatility; rather, it is his 'style of living sanely away from home, guarding against flights of paranoia and schizophrenia, making himself acceptable to his own moral code and accepting the traumata of the new country' (pp. 2-3). Much later in the novel, in the intrusion to which reference has already been made, Salkey defines this 'two-way Weltanschaaung' of his hero as 'nothing more than his way of realizing his Jamaican dream in London by looking at people, ideas and things, and naming them in terms of dialect, and also dealing with the observable realities in England by relying on his Standard English: in short, Catullus's two-way philosophical survey of and outlook on his former colonial-imperial world, through language' (p. 121). Whatever this explanation may mean, language used in this factitious manner must eventually break down, as it inevitably does, and with it must follow the dissolution of personality.

Catullus begins his odyssey with a year's sojourn in the United States; he then travels to England where his experiences, the substance of the novel, only serve to exacerbate his dissociation. No sooner does Catullus arrive in Britain than he begins to realize that it would take much more than his linguistic resilience to cope with the realities of the country to which he has come. In Kingston his search for his cultural legacy had only led to the discovery of his own 'rejection and alienation' (p. 113); now in London he encounters sexual dehumanization and finds that his image is predetermined by his race and colour. He is looked upon as a curious specimen, a modern Caliban in London, with as much potential for commercial exploitation as Trinculo noticed in the original.

In the beginning, Catullus is not troubled by these responses; in fact, he willingly accepts the roles that the effete society expects him to play, and easily surrenders to fiction and illusion. Catullus, seemingly free from the self-consciousness and bourgeois morality that plague Johnnie Sobert, allows nothing to interfere with his acceptance of any sexual offer. In bed or in bush, on the eiderdown or on the plinth of Nelson's Column, Catullus rises to the occasion, and Salkey shares in the reckless abandon of his hero in the very rhythm of the language he uses to describe his impiety: 'He plinth; they plinth, like impious pigeons.' Similarly, when the need for a job arises, and one could not be found because of his colour, Catullus needs little persuasion to accept the newly created position of an 'Atmosphere Man' in a fashionable coffee bar in Berkeley Square. His resourceful employer reasons that the dark figure of Catullus ought to provide the right colour and exoticism for the coffee business. The humour of the situation tickles Catullus and he agrees to the adoption of the onomatopoeic name 'Beano' to go along with his atmospheric look: 'a zombie stance, accompanied by a minimum of intelligence of expression' (p. 100). In no time Catullus achieves perfection in his role and business booms; but his hope that the clientele would notice the ridiculous image that he presents does not materialize: 'The trouble,' he writes in his diary, 'is everybody sees me only too obviously, zombie flesh and blood' (p. 107).

Entries like this serve to remind us, if indeed we need to be reminded, of the critical danger that to take Catullus at the surface level is to be taken in by his pose. Outwardly, Catullus presents an appearance of total indifference and imperturbable calm; in the privacy of his consciousness, however, he drops the pretence and faces up to the reality of his manner of living: 'He listened to his darting inner voice. It accused him of tasting the surface of London life. It raged against his sexual lightfootedness. It roared self-conscious guilt' (p. 110). But the comfort of self-deception is hard to give up: 'He coaxed himself into believing in the delight of being outside of everything he touched and saw around him. He was not alone. There were millions of others who were also outside everything. Most people were looking on, touching and seeing at a distance. They owned nothing. They were ripe for alienation. It was very nearly a noble condition' (p. 110). Reality finally ambushes Catullus:

> Catullus's bed-sitter suddenly became claustrophobic. The walls moved in on him; the bed broadened; the floor rose several feet; and the ceiling dropped and hovered perilously near his head. He went for a walk in Swiss Cottage. . . . He stopped and looked at his reflection in the first broad shop window as he approached; the details were indistinct and the outline was slightly smudged by the clash between the promenade lighting and the arc-lamps in the window. He was invisible but for the mere suggestion of a contour which he tried to seize. It eluded him. He walked on and thought about the warmth and reality of Dulcie's yielding body and its beautiful ritual. He was elated that something, which he had touched, actually existed for him, someone he had held, if only for a matter of a short time in a dark room. But even she did not belong to him; she was his cool usufruct; so were the easy sensations of London and New York.
>
> (The Adventures, pp. 113-14)

But in spite of Catullus's sense of oppressive alienation and rootlessness, and his awareness of his 'responsibility to devise a plan of attack on the reality of surfaces' (p. 114), Salkey tells us that the character absorbs all the confusion like 'an anarchic zombie' and perseveres in the pursuit of the pleasures of exile: 'Dream, illusion and hectic fantasy began to have a very real appeal for Catullus' (p. 114).

It is at this point in the novel that Catullus begins his fruitless search for a clear view of negritude, 'the end-product of his _Weltanschauung_, which, when properly developed, would give him the dignity of an Africoid; that is, all black men raised to the superlative degree of blackness, as all white men have been raised to the superlative degree of whiteness; in essence, like Caucasoid like Africoid, like Africoid like Caucasoid' (pp. 121-22). Catullus's painstaking explanation to Africans in England of 'the necessity for black empathy and solidarity' (p. 124), in 'both the richness and concrete appeal of dialect and the irony and abstract elegance of Standard English' (p. 120) falls upon deaf ears: 'The rebuffs were many and hopelessly final but the moments of tacit contempt were crushing. A black South African laughed; an Ehtiopian sighed; a Kenyan spat; a black Rhodesian shook his head; and the others merely stood, listened and looked through Catullus like Atmosphere Men. Negritude was a dead thing; they had all made it quite clear to Catullus' (p. 124). Failure to interest his African cousins 'either in his _tour de force_ of language or in his craving for a clear view of negritude' (p. 120), and finding them more 'ontologically human' than 'obdurately Africoid' (p. 122) lead Catullus to abandon his search for sympathetic pan-Negro collaborators for his project of a universal black brotherhood; at the suggestion of Erasmus and Bridget he visits Kenwood where he experiences the wonderful release of tension: 'Erasmus and Bridget were right; the small visit was therapeutic. His only regret was that Dulcie had declined his invitation to make the visit with him; he was aware that she was an earlier part of the healing art he was seeking; as Kenwood was proving to be for him' (p. 126).

Catullus bids farewell to London with a succession of visits to the several women he has known during the course of the year. In a tone that implies judgement of the character, Salkey writes:

> The round of special goodbyes which Catullus had taken six days to complete, had left him pained and dispirited. The experiences had been rich and varied, as most observers, who think philosophically about such stimuli, would agree; the contacts had been vibrant and often surprising; the lessons in position and permutation invaluable; the rewards immediate and satisfying to his vanity; but the whole exposure had ended in little more than a residue of emptiness. True, he had gained a permanent familiarity with the female form of an unusual few, but the sculptor's art, the painter's, the anatomist's was one thing, while his own exile's lifemanships conceded other needs, the practice of an art beyond the pleasures of intimacy.
>
> (The Adventures, p. 175)

Within six months of his arrival in Jamaica, Catullus is committed to a mental institution, inescapably, the victim of an acute case of paranoia and schizophrenia. The details of his eccentric behaviour are given in a letter written by his mother to his friend and mentor, Erasmus:

> . . . He took to reading aloud from his London diary to anyone who would stop and listen to him in the park at Parade. Shortly after that he left home, and we next heard of him again reading from a book called The Shape of Skulls to Come. He then took to assaulting passers-by with the book, and telling them that he was Winston Churchill's representative in the Island. . . . Then came the period when he really became a public nuisance. He preached the virtues of touching the surfaces of society, laying hands on the warm bonnets of cars, prodding the ooze of overheated asphalt on the streets, brushing the blades of grass on the University Campus, and finally gate-crashed a garden party at King's House and touched the Governor-General's wife on her hips and things. . . . He went from one extreme to the other, and one day, two weeks ago, he marched naked into the House of Representatives during a debate on the mechanization in agriculture, and demanded to speak on the sociological implications for the mass of people on what he called the loved land.
>
> (The Adventures, pp. 194-95)

The tragedy that befalls Catullus comes as a great shock to the other characters in the novel, especially Erasmus, through whose consciousness Salkey telescopes the brutal conditions that chronically plague Jamaica, and which corrode the human spirit:

> The human story and the events described in the letter were so alien, so brutally fantastic, as to be a whole world away from his own flat, realistic situation. And yet, the distance between London and Kingston was violently shortened to a frightening immediacy; the expanse of four thousand miles had contracted itself with the electric swiftness of a collapsed line overlapping milestones. Erasmus's early recollection of his native Kingston came racing back to him: the smallness of the enclosed area of living, the nearness of individual lives, the rawness of the reports of disappointment and defeat, the customary celebration of somebody's failure, the harshness of the comments, the intolerable existential life. Examples of conflict in class and the penalty of poverty came back to him: the sights, the closed doors, the lack of basic opportunities, the endemic cruelty, the dreams of organized struggle, the futility of dreaming.[8]
>
> (The Adventures, p. 193)

Salkey is nothing less than superb in his dramatic portrayal of Erasmus's distraction. With not so much as a word on his actual state of mind, Salkey manages, in a style worthy of Hemingway, to convey the abrasive emotional experience that Erasmus undergoes, vividly and concretely, through a description of his physical agitation:

> He walked round the kitchen mumbling irritably and touching first, the detergent foam in the sink, then the brillo pad, and afterwards, the hand of the bread knife, and the insurance calendar, the top of the fridge and the jagged edge of a broken salad bowl which Bridget refused to throw away . . . He turned to Peregrine. . . . He touched the jagged edge of the salad bowl again, then the oven dial of the cooker and the label on the marmalade jar on the bottom shelf of the cupboard. He looked compassionately at Dulcie, went up to the window and held out his hands and warmed them.
>
> (The Adventures, pp. 195-96)

The reader is affected as deeply as Erasmus at what has happened to Catullus; but because his perspective on the sequence of events that leads up to the tragedy is larger than that of the character, the catastrophe does not take him by surprise; indeed, Salkey relentlessly anticipates it by carefully and dramatically preparing the way for it. Madness seems the logical and inevitable culmination to the kind of discontinuous and superficial mode of existence that Catullus has led ever since his departure from the West Indies. Pathetic as his fate may seem, it satisfies our sense of psychological realism.

'"The mixture o' London an' 'ome"' is gravely suggested by Erasmus as the 'diabolical cause' of Catullus's insanity. There is a great deal of truth in this observation, perhaps more than

Erasmus intends. Catullus is certainly the victim of cultural confusion. More importantly for our appreciation of The Adventures of Catullus Kelly, the young man is a victim of a make-believe world: the harsh reality of Kingston will not accommodate the illusion of freedom which he brings back with him from his experience abroad.

In his essay, 'Dialect in West Indian Literature,' Ismith Khan strongly objects to the concerns with which West Indian writers are preoccupied in what he calls works "of exile":

> The setting of these works is a grim, grey London, and one of human waste, not only a waste of the immigrants' lives, but the life's work of the artist who should have been creating some body of work which would crystallize just what West Indian culture is, just in what direction it is headed, and just what its peoples are like. One gets extremely nostalgic glimpses of West Indian life from the immigrants in these works. The works deal principally with race and color, but with nothing which could add to that desperately needed core of identity, which to repeat, should be the foremost concern of the artist from the West Indies -- an area which cannot afford the luxury of an expatriate Hemingway writing about Spain, Africa, and Cuba.[7]

With the possible exception of Jean Rhys's A Voyage in the Dark, the novels we have looked at in this chapter can hardly be said to give us 'extremely nostalgic glimpses of West Indian life.' The boys in The Lonely Londoners reminisce about life in the West Indies only to relieve the tedium of the long, dreary winter months. Similarly, we may find in all of the novels incidental remarks on race and colour. Khan grossly exaggerates when he says that the works 'deal principally with race and colour,' and hardly does justice to the efforts of the novelists to tell the

West Indian 'who he is and where he stands.' The author of The Jumbie Bird is right, however, in his observation that the works of exile depict 'human waste.' From all of the novels we get the impression that West Indians in England waste their lives away in a meaningless existence. In the next chapter, which takes a look at what happens to those West Indians who make the homeward voyage, this impression is given further confirmation both explicitly and implicitly.

Chapter V

The Return of the Native

Whether or not they find the better break they seek when they emigrate, working class West Indians do not usually return home. It appears that they would rather remain on the fringe of an alien and hostile society than endure the poverty they have made every sacrifice to escape from. But the problem of socio-economic oppression is not one which the academically qualified West Indians have to face on their return: the opportunities that await them are many and various, especially if they have the right colour or political connection: 'West Indians who return home with university degrees often automatically become cultural, community, and political leaders. Many are tapped for leadership while they are still students abroad; others are swept into prominence the moment they return.'[1] Accordingly, fiction written on the experience of the returned native concentrates on these individuals, on their efforts to raise the cultural, social, and political consciousness of the ordinary people, and on the problems they encounter both in their public life and in their personal struggle to come to terms with the society to which they have returned with an inevitable change in their perspective and perception.

The process of adjustment can sometimes be extremely difficult, and often leads to the psychological destruction of the individual, as Salkey has shown us in The Adventures of Catullus Kelly.

Of course, Salkey is not the only West Indian novelist to envision this kind of fate for the West Indian who comes home; nor is he the first. In an earlier novel, The Last Enchantment (1960) by Neville Dawes, the central character, Ramsay Tull, suffers a nervous breakdown shortly after his return to Jamaica. Unlike Salkey, Dawes does not explicitly attribute the collapse of his hero to his experience abroad, and only tangentially links it to cultural conflicts within him. Tull is shown as being worn down by an abysmal lack of purpose in life.

In the early stages of the novel, Dawes presents Tull as the typical West Indian who receives a Western education and then learns to despise his own people. It is ironic that Tull's disdain for the black folk begins at Surrey College, an exclusive secondary school for Jamaican middle class boys, where he is painfully made aware of his own social liabilities as a poor black country boy:

> . . . Ramsay learned in his turn to despise the barefoot street-boys and was scrupulously careful never to use their coarse vivid language. He kept his distance from them just as the white boys did from him, only he was more ruthless in his snobbery and, in his hatred of their menace to his artificial superiority, he was utterly incapable of compromise.
>
> (The Last Enchantment, p. 29)

In the next paragraph, Dawes observes: 'Only in his last two years at school did the discovery of socialism begin to release him from the intolerable commitment to the perpetuation of a class to which he did not belong.'

On a subliminal level, however, Tull still identifies with the Jamaican bourgeoisie, whose prestige and privileges appeal to him.

His attraction to socialism at Surrey and its later pusillanimous expression when he drifts into the People's Progressive League, a proletarian party, have no ideological conviction. Tull merely invokes socialism as a means to divert suspicion from his identification with Jamaican middle-class values. Cyril Hanson, Tull's foil in the novel, hits the nail on the head when he facetiously tells Tull: '"You resent not being white. That's your great resentment. If you were white, everything would be fine"' (p. 65). But Tull is irrevocably black; so he vacillates between the working class people for whom he has no special love, but to whom he feels intellectually and politically committed, and the middle class to which he passionately wishes to belong, but is rejected by its members. Tull continues in this state of ambivalence until he leaves for Oxford on a prestigious scholarship.

It is quite obvious that Tull suffers from an acute sense of social inferiority. But his contradictory impulses are symptomatic of a more fundamental flaw in his personality. Dawes presents Tull as a weak young man who lacks the moral strength to choose and execute a purposeful course of action that will give stability and direction to his life. It is this lack, more than anything else, that causes Tull to drift aimlessly, without any consciousness of his personal or social responsibility: 'He wrote pamphlets for Edgar Bailey, had lunch with Dr. Phillips, sang the Red Flag on Thursday evenings at Miss Tillie's school, and would have tea with Mrs. Phillips next week' (p. 133).

Tull's experience at Oxford is characterized by the same absence of commitment. After his initial disenchantment with that venerable institution, Tull surrenders to the luxury of abdication; with his English friend, Guy Horne, an equally frivolous character, Tull begins a life of reckless abandon, almost obscene in its purposelessness. He barely scrapes a 'third' on graduation. On his return to Jamaica, Tull once more drifts into the League, no more responsibly involved than he was three years ago, only this time he is motivated by 'a sudden fanatical belief that the Jamaican middle class should be destroyed' (p. 249). It is at this point in the novel that we learn of his nervous breakdown and of his retreat to the peaceful mountain village of Orange Town to recuperate.

The Last Enchantment is not a successful novel. The work lacks structural unity as well as narrative focus: the several parts of the novel do not cohere into a whole and the point of view shifts disconcertingly. But it is in the realm of imaginative recreation that Dawes seems to flounder badly. The novel was apparently conceived as a political lampoon on the power struggle that ensued in Jamaica in the wake of its achievement of internal self-government in 1944. But Dawes's creative imagination could not respond to the challenge of a political novel that aspires to be mimetically accurate. His failure is most evident in his attempts to satirize some easily identifiable political figures of the time. As characters in a novel, they strike us as wooden and lifeless.

Perhaps we would be less severe in our criticism of The Last Enchantment if Lamming has not shown us in Of Age and Innocence

(1958) that a powerful creative imagination can transform more or less the same material Dawes uses in his novel into an impressive work of fiction. As the precursor of Season of Adventure, Of Age and Innocence describes the turmoil and chaos that befall San Cristobal as it prepares for national independence. Of Age and Innocence is therefore as much a political novel as The Last Enchantment. Lamming succeeds where Dawes fails, and he succeeds mainly because he does not allow his political zeal to overwhelm his sense of artistic responsibility. More specifically, as political to the core as Of Age and Innocence is, the dramatic focus of the novel is on the internal lives of the characters, the impulses which move them to act in the way they do, and the surprising and often bizarre results which follow.

Lamming, perhaps more than any other West Indian writer, is interested in the ironic discrepancy that often lies between human action and intention. In each of his novels this theme is given some degree of prominence; invariably, it takes the form of information withheld for a good reason. But in every instance the results prove more disastrous than if the truth were told. We have already seen the effects of failure in communication in Season of Adventure, and in Water With Berries (1970), it leads to murder. However, in none of his novels does Lamming give the theme as much attention as he does in the 1958 novel.

Of Age and Innocence is the kind of novel we would expect from the author of In the Castle of My Skin: it is an intricate work, written with characteristic care and precision. But the art of the novel is not entirely free from defects. On the whole, Lamming maintains a firm grip over his narrative material. Only on the rare occasion does he seem to allow his imagination to run away with him. A notable example of this lapse occurs in the scene in which Lamming describes Lee's fascination with figures. The passage begins appropriately from the point of view of the character, but Lamming then suddenly makes a detour into a generalization on the nature of mathematical calculations that has no direct relation to the character under observation:

> Every calculation began in an awareness of error. You always started with the determination to avoid a mistake. When any calculation was finished, and the result seemed satisfactory, you would check the figures to see that there was no mistake. And if a result was not satisfactory, you did the same. Any check of a count was an attempt to discover a mistake. Accuracy was simply the absence of a mistake, but it was always that chance of error which reigned over a calculation.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 249)

Of course, this self-indulgence is only a minor flaw in a major success. More serious faults, in my opinion and therefore debatable, emerge from the style of writing.

In Of Age and Innocence, as in all of his novels, Lamming tends towards a style of poetic intensity. His rich, sensuous appreciation of language, his capacity for vivid, explosive images, and his natural aptitude for the turn of the phrase, distinguish his prose with strength, beauty, and elegance. The following passage is typical:

> The wind slipped through the trees, soft as feathers, and the afternoon loitered over the house. The clouds came apart, travelling slowly out to sea, and the sun caught a fragment of glass that suddenly sprang a burning circle on the window. A multitude of leaves swung out of the trees, and the light fluttered like an eyelid closing into the shade of the window pane.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 161)

Consistently, Lamming tries to evoke the special atmosphere of the moment, as this passage clearly exemplifies. But his consciousness of the inadequacy of words to capture a particular experience forces him to rely on figurative language and the use of analogies. This tendency is particularly noticeable in his attempts to render the ineffable. Metaphors and similes are steadily used to allow us to catch the subtle nuances of his perception.

Unfortunately, in his passionate drive to intensify a particular experience, Lamming often falls into the snare of his own verbal conceit; for example, it is difficult to associate the drone of an airliner with 'a roomful of children carried by the same dream' (p. 41). The simile fails simply because it exhausts the imagination instead of liberating it. The same need for effect moves Lamming to substitute the metaphorical for the concrete: a piece of broken glass becomes a 'glint of glass.' This kind of stylization extends even to the language of his dialect-speaking characters: Thief and Ma Shephard, for example, are endowed with a poetic sensibility that is, in my view, carried to excess. Gerald Moore takes an entirely different view of the style of the novel: 'Stylistically as well as structurally, it marks a big advance in Lamming's resources as a novelist. He retains the flowing, rhythmic prose he developed in his earlier books, a prose capable of great richness and density of effect.'[2]

If Of Age and Innocence appears self-consciously heavy in its style, the way in which Lamming skilfully weaves the various strands of the novel into a harmonious whole is very impressive:

> Of Age and Innocence like Lamming's other novels, defies neat intellectual compartments; a complex private act is intimately bound up with an equally complex public stage; the two, while inseparable, exist in an uneasy juxtaposition, often at war, pulling in different directions; the moment of harmony between the private and the public is fleeting. Individuals and society, past and present, are wrought into a moving whole which brings people into a new historical chapter: but underlying the possibility of better prospects for the children are the unsettling memories of yesterday.[3]

It should be fairly obvious from this critical summary that the action of Of Age and Innocence does not develop sequentially; in fact, as an early reviewer of the novel notes, the work is 'fluid in structure,'[4] and although the contrapuntal plots touch at some points, there is very little formal narrative connection.

Of Age and Innocence is divided into three books. The action of Book One takes place on board an airliner bound for San Cristobal, but it is by no means transitive in character. Lamming alternates the focus of his attention on Mark Kennedy and Isaac Shephard, natives of San Cristobal, who have been living in England for a number of years and are now returning home for the first time. Mark is accompanied by his girl friend, Marcia, and his two friends, Penelope and Bill Butterfield, an English couple whose marriage has gone stale from a lack of challenge. On board the plane are also Rowley Crabbe, the son of San Cristobal Police

Commissioner, and his grandmother. All of these characters, along with some more, are slowly, but not inexorably, drawn into an intricate web of relationship once they arrive on the island, the setting for the second book; their lives touch in the most fortuitous of ways, and their individual destinies become inextricably interwoven by an ironic twist of fate or by a conspiracy of circumstances. The cryptic announcement of the murder of Shephard at the end of this book prepares us for the feverish atmosphere with which the third book opens, but not for the gothic tour de force of savage mutilation and murder and the possibility of multiple execution with which Lamming ends the novel.

To do full critical justice to Of Age and Innocence requires a response to the work as a whole. So far this examination has shown the strengths and weaknesses of the work, but it is now time to turn to the main purpose of the critique, which concerns the actions of Mark Kennedy and Isaac Shephard.

Of the two men, Mark is the more psychologically complex. Lamming depicts him as an artistic, morbidly introspective young man. Mark is compulsively drawn to San Cristobal, but nowhere in the novel are we given a reason for his sudden decision to return home after an absence of twenty years. We can only assume that his return has something to do with his need to fill the void at the centre of his being. Be this as it may, not long after his arrival, Mark drifts into the tide of political fervour that sweeps the island ever since the arrival of Shephard. But his involvement lacks motivation of any kind; once again, as so often in the past, his 'feeling of disinclination' (p. 78) enervates him. Lamming does not encourage us to see Mark's apathy as an expression of indifference: we are made to feel that it has its roots somewhere in his cultural deracination. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o quite persuasively argues that Mark bears some resemblance to the 'existential hero of French literature,' but goes on to note an essential difference: 'He is separated from the continuing life in the island, uprooted from its age-old customs and from those of his ancestors from Africa, and is not politically involved.'[5]

Mark is aware of his lack of commitment to any value, and this knowledge pains him; yet he does not seem to be able to overcome his inertia:

> This feeling of disinclination surrounds me like space. It enters me like air. It is like my hand which reminds me of the distance between me and the object it brings me into contact with. I can feel it like a clutch around my throat, an annihilation of things about me, a sudden and natural dislocation of meaning. And it is no force other than me which moves me. It is me.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 73)

To make matters even worse, Lamming conceives Mark as a man who finds it extremely difficult to communicate his feelings:

> I try to find a way which would enable others to enter my secret so that they might, through a common experience, lead me to its source. But my effort moves off the mark. I begin, as it were, from the circumference of my meaning, moving cautiously and with loyal feeling, towards a centre which very soon I discover I cannot reach. Then speech deserts me. I abandon what I had felt to be an obligation, and the result is silence.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 110)

Within the dramatic structure of the novel, the result of this incomprehensible inability to talk is more than silence. Mark's reticence puts a severe strain on Penelope and Bill, and drives Marcia, whose need for love and affection Mark ignores, to despair and eventually to madness. But it is Mark who is tormented most by this flaw in his character. Unable to unburden his soul, Mark withdraws deeper and deeper into his shell, until, like the young German he met years ago in Europe, he too becomes out of touch with humanity.

So solidly does Mark freeze his emotions that not even the horrible death of the girl who lives only for him evokes any kind of response from him:

> 'It seemed that Marcia had never been alive. I tried to cheat my feeling, rehearsed the role of a man in mourning; but my memory served no purpose. I felt innocent as the clouds which collected overhead. Innocent and free. I was deprived of the ordinary response to the death of one who loved you. In her life I had consumed the resources of her love, and in her death I was without the virtues of guilt or regret. And now her absence, like my total lack of feeling, reminded me that something which probably remains alive with every man, had never been truly born in me.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 310)

The cruelty of this epitaph reverberates against the incredible sense of relief Mark experiences when his mother dies; only this time, so complete is his loss of sensibility that he does not even wish that the dead were momentarily alive so that he might have another chance to redeem his cruelty with a confession of the sickness that throttles his tongue.

The idea of suicide occurs to Mark, but at the crucial moment, a sudden wave of inertia overcomes him, and the knife falls from his hand. Mark's failure to take his life makes very little difference: he is already dead, spiritually as well as emotionally, and has been so for a long time, ever since his life became identical with his 'soothing lack of feelings' (p. 313). Even Mark realizes this, and in the shredding of his diaries, he symbolically enacts his own death. Nothing now stands in his way of psychic disintegration.

Lamming does not judge Mark; his portrayal of the young man is impressively objective yet compassionate. If there is any clue in the novel that leads us to believe that Lamming may be critical of Mark, it is to be found implicitly in his presentation of Shephard as a foil to the young man, in his refusal to allow Mark to find release, as he will later allow Fola in Season of Adventure, from his condition of spiritual death.

There are many similarities between Mark and Shephard, but the qualities that differentiate the two men are the sense of purpose with which Shephard comes home and the confidence in his ability to shape his own destiny as well as the future of San Cristobal:

> 'I know San Cristobal. It is mine, me, divided in a harmony that still pursues all its separate parts. No new country, but an old old land inhabiting new forms of men who can never resurrect their roots and do not know their nature. Colour is their old and only alphabet. The whites are turning whiter, and the blacks are like an instinct which some voice, my voice, shall exercise.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 58)

Megalomanic as this declaration may seem at the time, later events prove it to be no idle boast. Mark notes in his diary that since their arrival four months ago, Shephard 'has grown into a national legend' (p. 111); indeed, in that short space of time, Shephard has risen from the shadow of insanity to become a 'political demagog.' From his first politically astute expansion of Singh's racially oriented 'Indian Freedom Party' into a national movement that cuts across racial boundaries to his commonsensical emphasis on the colonial heritage common to all West Indians regardless of their origins in his campaign, Shephard reveals himself as a man of vision and intelligence. With his promise of the dawn of a new day of political freedom, social and economic justice, and racial equality, Shephard arouses San Cristobal, as Penelope puts it, to a 'new conception of itself' (p. 85).

It is characteristic of the narrative technique of the novel that we do not see Shephard directly in action. Lamming shows the imaginative authority of the man through the collective voice of the people:

> 'Was like a new day o' deliverance,' someone said, 'the day he announce that speech when the music stop.'
> ''Tis words make him work his magic,' a woman said, 'when a man got words he can open any ear.'
> 'An' magic don't take no time to work,' said the man, 'before your eye clap twice you in the spell.'
> 'He move my heart that morning',' the woman said, 'an' if I could have lay my han' on them who say he was mad, only if I could have lay my han' on the lyin' tongue that try to slander his brain.'
> 'They didn't want him to do the work he start,' the man said, 'but he choose the right day to make that speech, the morning' we celebrate San Cristobal. 'Tis a next day o' deliverance he goin' bring.'

> 'An' he aint talk no lies,' the woman said, 'he aint let his tongue slip a single lie when he say that San Cristobal is his an' mine, an' how he goin' make it belong to everybody who born here.'
> ''Tis why they say he mad an' make that disturbance on the plane,' said the man, 'the spirit must have tell them what plan his min' was makin'.'
> 'Those who born here come first,' said the woman, 'he make it plain as scripture that we got to come first. An' for that they call him mad. But if 'tis mad, 'tis a madness we been waitin' for God only knows how long.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, pp. 76-77)

It is at this point in the novel that Lamming reveals another side of Shephard that places both the man and the twin themes of exile and return into clearer perspective. We learn that it is not concern for the political fate of San Cristobal that impels Shephard to return; it is the need to sublimate through action a bitter experience he has had in England:

> 'My son, as I say, was ambitious, even as a chil', an' 'tis the reason he take up himself as he do, some years gone by, an' sail all the way up to England. This England was in his blood, an' 'tis what bring final ruin to him. Whatever happen there I cannot in a manner of certainty speak, but he had a bad experience which teach him to rebel, an' it come out in his dreams. Many a night I hear him shout out in sleep, using the worst words, which was a great change, 'cause he never swear to my knowledge, the most awful language he could fin', he painted those who make his experience painful. . . . Whatever they do to him there I don't know, but he came back here, full up with great hate for that England, an' the only way he could work it off was in the great fight he start for the poor workers . . .'.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 332)

The reader, of course, has the advantage over Ma Shephard, and knows the nature of the experience that has given her son such horrible nightmares. Shephard, it would seem, had been stared at in England, and as a result has developed an abnormal fear of being looked at directly; in fact, so terrified had Shephard become of the eyes of another that his powerful imagination and extraordinary sensitivity interpreted every glance as an 'act of persecution':

> Of all the senses which serve our knowledge of those around us, it is the eye which I could not encounter in peace. It is as though my body defined all of me, and then played the role of traitor for those who watched. So that the eye of the other became for me a kind of public prosecutor. I felt surrounded by a perpetual act of prosecution. I was judged finally by the evidence which my body, a kind of professional spy, always offered. And there are times when I have felt my presence utterly burnt up by the glance which another had given me. I wanted to disappear or die. I don't think I have always had this feeling, but I was aware of it for the first time in England, and then a certain relationship helped to put it beyond my control. It was no longer a private fear. It became an obsession which possessed me completely . . .'.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, pp. 112-113)

The character Dickson in The Emigrants, we may recall, suffered from a similar fear after his encounter with his landlady and her sister. In the earlier novel, Lamming does not attach as much significance to the experience as he now does in Of Age and Innocence. The motif, which we may call 'the seizure by the eye,' as Lamming now presents it, comes through as an essential function in the process of colonialism that began with the middle passage and still determines the status of the West Indian Negro. Shephard shrinks at the glance of another man because he has been made to realize through his experience in England that his colour is the basis of his social and human worth:

> 'Most people do not discover anything,' he said, 'They learn things, or they hear about them, but that is different from seeing, really seeing something. I discovered that until then, until that experience, I had always lived in the shadow of a meaning which others had placed on my presence in the world, and I had played no part at all in making that meaning, like a chair which is wholly at the mercy of the idea guiding the hand of the man who builds it.'
>
> He paused to find an example that would make things simpler, but now he seemed in a hurry to speak, as though his vision had some way of escaping if he did not hurry to pass it on.
>
> 'Take the chair,' he said, 'that may help. It is impossible for a chair to object to the way it is being made, to say I prefer to look like this. A chair can have any size or shape, but a chair could never object to being a chair.'
>
> He paused, steadying his hands as he watched Penelope.
>
> 'Now take me. I am not a chair, but this meaning placed on my presence in the world possessed me in the same way that the idea of chair is from the start in complete possession of any chair, irrespective of its shape, size, usefulness. Any chair is a chair. Similarly, the meaning I speak of had already made me for the other's regard. A stupid me, a sensible me, a handsome me, any me you can think of always remained me. But like the chair, I have played no part at all in the making of that meaning which others use to define me completely.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 203)

Shephard is a black man. The adjective is indispensable in the definition of his status. 'Black' qualifies and limits his humanity. He is seen as a man, but a man only when certain reservations, associated with his colour, are made.

In his novels and critical writings, Lamming returns again and again to the colonial image of the Negro in the eyes of what he calls the 'Other.' But with equal persistence, he also draws attention to the role the black man plays in his own devaluation. The violence with which Shephard responds to the glance of another, for example, goes beyond his consciousness that he is on trial; it contains shame of his colour, which in turn leads to self-rejection.[6] Shephard is only dimly aware, if at all, of this feeling of self-denigration; his main concern revolves around the failure of the 'Other' to see him as a man in a world of men. It is of course paradoxical that Shephard needs the very authority that denies his essential humanity to establish the authenticity of his existence. But, as Lamming tells us, Shephard is a victim of 'history,' which 'has baptized him with a need to achieve approval and the ultimate embrace of a spiritual authority which is dedicated to his perpetual self-imprisonment.'[7]

The objectivity with which Lamming conceives Shephard can be further seen in his presentation of the character as being susceptible to the corruptive influence of power.[8] On the eve of election day, Shephard, overwhelmingly sure that he will win, dilates on the infinite authority that his victory will bring to him:

> 'Tomorrow, respected comrade, I shall hold this land in the palm of my hand, and bend it like a wheel to meet my intention. I shall call on the earth to clap and the water to sing and every living thing shall tell its pleasure in a humble service to my sovreignty on an island that once slept under water. But tonight, Kennedy, I shall walk the water and for a moment consult with my Maker.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, pp. 316-317)

The implication in this declaration is terrifyingly clear: Shephard has become a victim of the very '"curriculum of privilege in San Cristobal"' (p. 204) that he pledges to destroy, and in his intoxication with power aspires to godhead.

It is possible to explain Shephard's delusion of grandeur as a dramatic expression of Lamming's awareness of the moral danger that lurks in the access to absolute power. But as we glance back through the pages of the novel, we find that Lamming consistently draws Shephard, even as a boy, with a penchant for the exercise of authority. In the drama of the chairs which Mark recalls, and the address Shephard delivers at the end of the ceremony, we see how much of the boy survives in the man:

> '. . . Children in darkness, do not ask to change, and do not be angry that you cannot of your own accord make a change in your condition. Be happy to serve, and if you serve well, there will be reward for your service. Your purpose is fulfilled in your perfect service, and the rest is my burden. Love is mine and punishment too, and these are difficult to bear to children, even to you. But I shall give love and punishment as I see fit, and it is your perfect service which will help to decide . . .'.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 109)

Shephard reminds Mark of this particular occasion, and further adds:

> 'You I choose,' he said, 'I choose you to share my feeling as you share my secret then. You remember? You remember my children, you remember how they kneel at my bidding? And how they stand in a silence to respect my prayer. Tomorrow it will come to pass again. It will come to pass, and you will share my feeling once more, you will carry my secret . . .'.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 316)

Shephard urges Mark to join him in his endeavours, and 'prove loyal always' (p. 317); yet, he does not hesitate to betray personal friendship and political loyalty:

> 'What you witness now, comrade of my golden days, our colleagues shall consider my neglect of their favours. To have seen their leader in the fullness of that light which led us to victory, and with an ear made perfect for wonders. Such a large pleasure is mine that you are what you are. And so you must attend my prayers at the Point.'
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 318)

What Shephard means when he tells Mark, 'Such a large pleasure is mine that you are what you are,' is not quite clear. It may be in reference to the secret they share. But it is not easy to overcome the feeling that there is a racial insinuation in his words: Mark, like Shephard, is a black man. At any rate, now that Shephard is assured of victory, he does not seem to feel the further need to be scrupulous in his relationship with Singh and Lee.

If this interpretation is not wildly subjective, and Shephard does indeed consider Singh and Lee expendable, then the disconsolation of both his colleagues at his death, their fierce allegiance to his memory and the brutal action they take to avenge his murder are replete with irony. There is even a kind of perverse poetic justice in the fact that Shephard is murdered by Baboo, who wishes Singh to assume leadership, just after Shephard has chosen Mark to share in his hour of glory. When all this has been said, however, the tribute that Singh pays to Shephard still remains a fitting epitaph to the man to whom San Cristobal owes its political awakening:

> 'There never was a man who make me feel more deep than Shephard,' he said, 'an' never will be. Whatever difference might set us apart from time to time, always a little voice like conscience would come back to tell me what Shephard was worth. Such a man never happened in San Cristobal before, never. He take the struggle which I start and turn it to a movement that was now more than losin' or winnin'. Win or lose, it could not matter no more when I watch that man work with me, telling me his open ambition which all San Cristobal know, but also his private grievance too. He expose himself to me in a way I never learn to do to any friend however near. An' through him I learn, I learn for the first time what it could mean to feel loyal, not only to the cause but loyal

> to the person too. I come near to lovin' Shephard as any man came to lovin' a next, and it was his murder twist my heart like it was my own son dying in front my face. . .'.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 379)

To move from an analysis of the character of Shephard through his relationship with the men with whom he shares his life to the effects of his death on the world of the novel is to move from an area of human experience that Lamming explores rather tentatively to an area that particularly suits his creative imagination. In typical fashion, Lamming slides away from a sequential presentation of the circumstances that lead to Shephard's murder and concentrates on its consequences. When Book Three opens, Shephard's death is a fait accompli, and the trial of Mark and Bill, who are accused of his murder, is about to begin. Again, as in his other novels when such dramatic moments occur, Lamming withdraws his prerogative of omniscience and invokes the voice of the people:

> First Voice: Today is a day.
> Second Voice: Believe me, it is. Most certainly.
> First Voice: A day of days, I tell you.
> Third Voice: In my lifetime, to be sure.
> First Voice: In the lifetime of any of us standing here this bright Monday morning.
> Third Voice: You are right, upon my word, you are. 'Tis a case for history. An' a fair trial it will be. If all goes well.
> Fourth Voice: You've spoken a mouthful, my son, saying as you say a minute ago, if all goes well.
> First Voice: They will be hanged.
> Second Voice: By the grace of God, they goin'. When all is heard of what happen that night. The Law will heal what they do.
> Third Voice: An' may the good Lord have mercy.
> Second Voice: As men, His mercy they deserve, but as beasts they will bury with a rope round their neck.
> Third Voice: A most shameful murder they make.
> First Voice: And of one who was truly call' to lead us into the light. As it was with our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, wasn't it?

> Fourth Voice: You speak a word, my friend, so it was with our leader, Shephard.
> Third Voice: He would have us see the light, and he die' for it. But they will find out their mistake, the criminals, oh yes, they will. Let's leave everything to God.
> Fourth Voice: An' the Law.
> (Of Age and Innocence, pp. 327-28)

The Law does exercise its power, but not in the way the people expect. Fearful that the emotional intensity with which they respond to the loss of their leader may escalate into bloody violence, the Government declares a state of emergency and calls in British troops. The situation grows even more volatile when Mark and Bill escape, Crabbe, the Police Commissioner, is missing, and Singh and Lee are held on murder charges.

The separate events which give rise to these developments in the novel are much too intricate to relate here. It suffices to say that Lamming presents Crabbe as an ironic victim of his machination, Singh as an innocent victim of a sequence of ironic circumstances, and Mark Kennedy as a man dead to the world:

> He was aware of nothing but the black, unspeakable contingency which joined his life to the sea. He looked at the water which had already smothered his wish, and thought that he could not even summon the will which had formerly urged him to redeem the meaning of his life by freely choosing its end. His death in San Cristobal would have been a waste, and the ship which waited could offer him no alternative. He sat alone, feeling the water spray his hands, and wondered for a moment why he had joined Bill in his escape from the prison. But he could not tell, for he felt nothing but a strange absence of regret, some familiar and anonymous void that widened within and around him, denying all expectation. He had become superfluous to life, unfit to die.
> (Of Age and Innocence, p. 378)

In the final movement of the novel, Lamming shows the tragic effects of the recent events in San Cristobal. The bond which

Shephard had forged, as the Third Voice puts it, 'between you an' me an' every race that live with sufferin' in San Cristobal' (p. 347) has been broken. Suspicion, fear, and confusion spread over the land, as it returns once more to its racially divisive state:

> The Indians worked furiously with small push carts, hurrying up and down along the pier. They were cruel with labour to their bodies, and their faces were strained with secrecy and spite and expectation. They were going to rob the future of what was left. The Negroes sat heavy, large, indolent, unwilling and destructive. They rebuked all possessions by a show of indifference. They were killing time with their hands. Their labour was irrelevant and misplaced. The Chinese moved everywhere with severe and stoic reservation. They were not worthy of any interruption, and they were now no part of any alliance, but they were going to earn their share of everything. They were the tribe of willing exiles, who watched the weather, and anticipated every occasion of danger.
>
> (Of Age and Innocence, pp. 385-86)

Lamming does not end Of Age and Innocence on a note of pessimism. At the conclusion of the novel, the boys, Singh, Lee, and Bob, whose friendship transcends racial and cultural differences, reaffirm their pledge of allegiance. This is not to say that the recent events in San Cristobal do not touch them; far from it, the death of Rowley, their friend, makes them painfully aware of the grim facts of life, and the impending trial of two of their fathers on false charges sharpens this awareness. There is even a slight change in the openness of their relationship, which marks the beginning of their passage from innocence to age. But in their refusal to leave the grave of Rowley at curfew time, they make it abundantly clear that they listen to the voice of a higher law: 'The curfew rang, ordering every street to be empty. But they would not stir. They sat in silence beside the grave. And the sound reached them again, irrelevant as the noise of the sea, an ordinary part of the night, like the howl of a dog shut out. The Law could not now enter their feeling' (p. 413).

The two perspectives on the West Indian who returns home, which Lamming provides through Mark Kennedy and Isaac Shephard in Of Age and Innocence, are separately explored by V.S. Naipaul in The Mimic Men (1967) and O.H. Patterson in An Absence of Ruins (1966). In Naipaul's novel, the hero, Ralph Singh returns to Isabella, a fictional island in the West Indies, drifts into politics, and when his political career abruptly ends, accepts the offer of a free and safe passage to London; in Patterson's novel, the central character, Alexander Blackman, also flirts briefly with politics on his return to Jamaica. But the main purpose of the novel is to show Blackman as a man obsessively driven by the need to authenticate his existence. The emptiness with which Blackman comes up in his search for evidence to establish his identity leads to some extremely strange behaviour by the character, and eventually to his breakdown and exile. Of the two novels, The Mimic Men is the more interesting, although both novels represent major technical advances for both authors.

Ever since its publication, The Mimic Men has stood in the shadow of A House for Mr. Biswas. There are good reasons for this. But if the earlier work is a masterpiece, a similar claim can also be made for the later novel. The organization of the material of The Mimic Men reveals a technical skill that Naipaul has not previously shown in any of his novels, and the work itself poses a greater critical challenge to the reader than A House for Mr. Biswas.

The Mimic Men takes the form of a fictive autobiography, but it differs from the conventional autobiographical novel. Naipaul abandons the traditional method of narration for a technique that frees the novel from the tyranny of a chronological structure. The events of the novel do not develop in a linear progression, but, evoked by the mnemonic imagination, are linked together by common elements, and are meditated upon by the narrator who seeks to impose some kind of order upon his chaotic life. In consequence, the narrative shuttles backwards and forwards, often bewilderingly, as in Lord Jim. With the exception of the second section of the novel, which is quite straightforward, this disruption in the continuity of the action by a deliberate system of advances and retreats constitutes the formal design of The Mimic Men.

Criticism of The Mimic Men avoids commentary on its narrative strategy; yet it seems to me that the very strength of the novel lies in its total aesthetic structure. To merely grasp the theme of the novel is to miss the singularly forcible way Naipaul manages to compel our attention and involve our emotions and intellect through the narrative form he chooses. The choice of the discontinuous mode of narration for this particular novel is, to my mind, an expression of genuine creative intuition. For not only does the narrative technique allow Naipaul to explore the familiar theme of rootlessness and the search for identity in a more creative way; it also allows Singh to recall to mind, through the process of association, events in his life which are widely separated in time and space, and by the same medium restore them to their proper perspective. Furthermore, the technique produces a mild form of repetition. But it is interesting to note that Singh constantly modifies his responses to events, and reinterprets his experiences when he comes to examine them in greater detail. The technique, however, is not without its price. Naipaul sacrifices a great deal of dramatic tension and narrative suspense through the anticipatory glances he allows Singh to throw at events to come. But when we remember that Singh is actually reconstructing his life in an attempt to find some pattern to his failure, we realize how suitable is the technique for this purpose.

The action of The Mimic Men alternates between the city of London and the island of Isabella, and although the main purpose of the discussion of the novel is to focus on the experiences of the protagonist since his return, it is necessary to move through the details of his life, beginning with his departure from the island for the first time. By doing so one hopes not only to pave the way for a discussion of the aspect of the novel that directly concerns us, but also to give an overview of the whole novel.

Shortly after his graduation from Isabella Imperial College, Singh goes to England, apparently to escape from the endemic disorder he finds in Isabella. 'To be born in an island like Isabella, an obscure New World Transplantation, second-hand and barbarous,' he writes, 'was to be born to disorder' (p. 141). 'Shipwreck' is the image Singh repeatedly uses to describe his sense of psychic fragmentation and placelessness. Ironically, the London, to which Singh flees, in the hope of finding order, stability, and security, proves to be a greater disorder, an even greater shipwreck than Isabella. Singh's first view of the city, from the attic of the boarding-house in which he stays, presages his disillusion: 'And looking out from that room to the thin lines of brown smoke rising from ugly chimney-pots, the plastered wall of the house next to the bombsite tremendously braced and buttressed . . . I felt all the magic of the city go away and had an intimation of the forlornness of the city and of the people who lived in it' (p. 9).

To add to his disenchantment with the general physical unattractiveness of the city, Singh discovers that the human landscape is made up of a 'conglomerate of private cells' (p. 22). London appears to him cold and impersonal; it is 'a city of lights,' which, however, radiates no warmth of human life. It is crowded; but the people do not constitute an organic society, only an aggregate of individuals who are trapped in a dreary existence: 'The tram was filled with individuals, each man returning to his own cell' (p. 23). London, as Singh perceives it, is a dismal city. But for the emigrant, whose loneliness is intensified by the deprivation of the sources from he draws his spiritual strength, and his alienation from the environment in which he lives, London is a nightmare:

> In this great city, so three-dimensional, so rooted in its soil, drawing colour from such depths, only the city was real. Those of us who came to it lost some of our solidity; we were trapped into fixed, flat postures. And, in this growing dissociation between ourselves and the city in which we walked, scores of separate meetings, not linked even by

> ourselves, who became nothing more than perceivers: everyone reduced, reciprocally, to a succession of such meetings, so that first experience and then the personality divided bewilderingly into compartments. Such person concealed his own darkness.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 32-33)

These voluntary exiles, of course, constitute only one of the several sets of hollow men that Naipaul describes in the novel, and here, as elsewhere, Singh is the dramatic representative. As in Isabella, where his sense of dislocation leads him to create a world of fantasy, so it is also in London:

> It is a moment that comes to me fleetingly when I go out to the centre of this city, this dying mechanized city, and in the window of a print shop I see a picture of the city of other times: sheep, say, in Soho Square. Just for an instant I long to be transported into that scene, and at the same time I am overwhelmed by the absurdity of the wish and all the loss that it implies; and in the middle of a street so real, in the middle of an assessment of my situation that is so practical and realistic, I am like that child outside a hut at dusk, to whom the world is so big and unknown and time so limitless; and I have visions of central Asian horsemen, among whom I am one, riding below a sky threatening snow to the very end of an empty world.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 97-98)

In addition to this pastoral world which he conjures up as a prophylactic against his intensified loneliness, Singh carefully cultivates the image of a 'dandy, the extravagant colonial, indifferent to scholarship' (p. 24). The assumption of this 'character of the rich colonial' is not whimsical; it ties in with Singh's constant need for reassurance, the desire for 'the guidance of other men's eyes' (p. 23). In keeping with this image of the dandy, Singh sets out to ensnare and conquer women. His victims are usually European girls who are lonely and whose language he does not know: 'It suited me better to have a relationship with someone whose language I couldn't speak' (p. 26). This barrier, of course, reduces his involvement to the level of the purely physical, and removes any complication of social and human intercourse. Singh scores repeatedly. But his activity marks the beginning of his moral and physical deterioration. From naive, foreign girls, Singh moves to prostitutes. Yet the restlessness remains, the ache of alienation grows more painful, and his corruption and self-violation continue. When the Kensington group breaks up, Singh starts to drift: 'From room to room I moved, from district to district, going even further out of the heart of the city' (p. 36). Still, the peace he seeks eludes him; he carries his rootlessness wherever he goes. Eventually, his isolation and reckless dissipation, not to mention his consciousness of the utter futility and waste of his life, cause Singh a nervous breakdown. It is at this point in the novel that he feels the urge to return to the island which he has rejected only a few years ago: 'I abolished all landscapes to which I could not attach myself and longed for those I had known. I thought of escape, and it was escape to what I had so recently sought to escape from' (p. 36). Two years elapse before Singh is able to salvage enough of the wreck that he has become to be able 'to go back as whole as I had come' (p. 36). And when he does leave for Isabella, he takes with him an English wife, as well as the 'shipwreck' that accompanied him on the outward voyage.

It is quite clear that Singh decides to return home only after the ideal world of his imagination crumbles. But so faithful is

Naipaul in his presentation of the figure he has drawn of Singh that he refuses to allow the character to use his disillusionment with London as an occasion to indulge in false emotions and sentiments for his native country. Isabella still remains for Singh amorphous and anarchic, and the 'twinge of fear' he feels at the quay soon materializes in the conviction that he could never feel at ease in the island. Moreover, in his pride, Singh considers his return to Isabella, so soon after his renunciation of it, 'a failure and humiliation' (p. 60).

But if Singh cannot emotionally and spiritually identify with Isabella, Naipaul endows him with a capacity to sublimate his estrangement. Immediately upon his arrival, Singh and Sandra attach themselves to a 'neutral fluid group,' made up of young, professional Indians, with a few local whites and coloured, and some Americans, and held together by 'their expatriate and fantastically cosmopolitan wives or girl friends' (p. 66). The artificiality of the group does not escape Singh; in fact, it is this very quality that attracts him in the first place. For in its dedication to pleasure, Singh finds the perfect atmosphere to continue the 'celebratory mood' with which he left London.

Singh refers to this period of his life as a kind of watershed:

> In that period of my life which was to follow, that period between my preparation for life and my withdrawal from it, that period in parenthesis, when I was most active and might have given the observer the impression of a man fulfilling his destiny, in that period intensity of emotion was the thing I never achieved.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 38)

Intensity of emotion is not the only thing Singh does not achieve during this period; he does not succeed as a husband nor as a politician either. But Singh does manage to amass a fortune from land development schemes, the success of which he attributes to his intuition and not to any sound business acumen:

> A man, passionate for security, works and saves for a lifetime and is lucky at the end to have ten thousand pounds. Another, placid with the knowledge of his own imminent extinction, makes half a million dollars in five years. Neither ambition nor design comes into it, I feel. The gift falls on us. When we are in the middle of success nothing seems so easy or natural; in failure, nothing seems so unlikely.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 71-72)

But this material success, which Singh continues to achieve while other similar ventures fail, carries a price which he pays: 'It sets us apart; it distorts us, it separates us from the self we recognize and to which we remain close' (p. 73). The group, within which Singh and his wife move, respond to their wealth with envy: 'We were constantly challenged, provoked, tested' (p. 76). Relationships become volatile, until 'at last an undeclared state of war existed between the others and ourselves. We continued to meet and to offer and receive hospitality; but it was now accepted that no holds were to be barred' (p. 79). Sandra becomes the immediate object of malicious gossip: 'She became a girl from the East End of London, without breeding or education, who had been rescued by myself, besotted by the glamour of her race' (p. 79).

Singh reacts to the 'stories of lasciviousness, betrayal and even sexual quaintness' (p. 80) which circulate about them with his customary 'placidity.' But the attacks take their toll on Sandra, despite her cutting remarks in retaliation. Singh misjudges her 'gift of the phrase' as an expression of strength, and only later recognizes how insecure and vulnerable she really is:

> It did not occur to me that she was not always able to handle a situation which she had provoked; it did not occur to me that, with the gift of the phrase, she could also be vulnerable to the phrase; and that against a low level of distortion she was helpless, as some children remain helpless against the taunts of their fellows, for all the philosophizing of their elders.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 80-81)

The realization comes too late, much too late: 'I wish I had seen then, as I see so clearly now, that she was sinking' (p. 81).

Estrangement from the people, 'whose welcome meant so much, whose friendship we value, whose pleasure we share' (p. 75), reveals the tenuous relationship that exists between Singh and Sandra as man and wife. Social isolation, however, is not the cause of the failure of their marriage, which, to begin with, did not have a solid foundation: Singh and Sandra had come together for mutual self-defence during a time of stress for both of them. Naipaul locates the source of the collapse of their marriage in their lack of identification with the land in which they live, and in the absence of reciprocal spiritual support. Both Singh and Sandra find nothing culturally rewarding in Isabella:

> Into that most inferior place in the world. Where could we go? The beaches? We knew them all; we could take them 'as read.' The mountain villages, Negro or mulatto, with their slave history and slave customs? They were more exciting to read about in the Sunday edition of the Inquirer than to see: rundown villages of concrete and corrugated iron, set in green, always shining green, like a dozen others elsewhere.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 82-3)

And yet, despite the meanness of the island cultural life, the couple fear to be by themselves alone at home:

> At nights we would go out driving, just for the sake of motion. We drove to the airport and sat drinking in the lounge with intransit passengers, listening to the names of foreign cities. We hunted out every new bar or restaurant or nightclub: Isabella was the sort of place where such establishments regularly opened and closed under new management. We were at our happiest outside; it was outside, in a crowd, late at night, the champagne working, that we communed.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 83)

The sensual mood (see p. 83) which Sandra arouses in Singh more often than not vanishes before they arrive home:

> But the mood that overcame us seldom came to any consummation. It might have done if we were willing to outrage all sensibility, to do in public what plebian rumour attributed to our group. But the mood seldom carried us to our house; we could not obliterate the feeling of failure, the feeling of the house's emptiness, the feeling that whatever solution we achieved would be only temporary, would not destroy the night or the morning to come.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 83-4)

From an emotionally dead relationship to sexual promiscuity, the step is almost inevitable, and Singh takes it with ease and indifference:

> We violate no body so much as our own; towards it we display the perversity of a cat that constantly rips its wounds open. I saw that there was waste; and I felt, let there be waste. The habits of my student days, which had never altogether died, were now revived. On the island I had become acquainted with a number of women of various races, of the utmost discretion; what had been an occasional extravagance became, as before, an addiction, but now guiltless and clinical. Sometimes, I had to stifle my own disgust; sometimes it went well.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 84-85)

Ironically, it is during this emotionally stressful period that Singh comes to feel a certain pity and responsibility for his wife.

This change in his attitude occurs when Sandra tells him that the island of Isabella has begun to hem her in, and she feels cut off from the rest of the world: 'One morning . . . she told me she had awakened in the night with a feeling of fear, a simple fear of place, of the absent world' (p. 81). Singh knows this fear only too well; it is the fear that once drove him away from Isabella, now reawakened in him as he watches Sandra sink beneath the scurillous attacks on her:

> For myself I felt only a slight, sickening twinge of fear. It was fear of the unreality around me; it was the fear of the man who feels the veils coming down one by one, muffling his deepest responses, and panics at not being able to tear down the unreality about him to get at the hard, the concrete, where everything becomes simple and ordinary and easy to seize.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 85-6)

It is an expression of Naipaul's ironic sense of life that this spiritual compatibility, which should bring the couple together, is made to serve as a wedge that drives them further apart.

The decay in their marriage has gone too far for Singh and Sandra to make any attempt to salvage it:

> It only remained now for Sandra to leave. It could not have been an easy time for her. But the true wound I thought to be mine, and I believed by saying nothing I was behaving well. Sandra was after all in a position to leave: other relationships awaited her, other countries. I had nowhere to go; I wished to experience no new landscapes; I had cut myself off from that avidity which I still attributed to her. It was not for me to decide to leave; that decision was hers alone. We continued to go out together; we continued to try out new restaurants and nightclubs. But I was waiting for her to leave.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 91)

And leave Sandra does. One day Singh returns home and finds her gone, and despite what he says in the above quotation, Naipaul manages to make us feel a great deal of sympathy for the English girl who comes to the West Indies, full of life and vitality, only to be broken by a thoughtless husband and a mean society.

The departure of Sandra brings an end to what Singh calls only an 'episode' in this period of his life and his entry into politics, which follows immediately, is similarly seen as an interlude: 'For me politics remained little more than a game, a heightening of life, an extension of the celebratory mood in which I returned to my island' (p. 45). But if Singh considers his involvement in politics as 'little more than a game,' it is a game that he plays with relish. From the moment Browne, a former school friend and now editor of the paper "The Socialist," suggests that '"The Socialist" should celebrate the anniversary of the dockworkers' exodus from the city, and I myself should write the main article about my father' (p. 226), the idea appeals to Singh, who sees the opportunity to expiate his sense of guilt for his denial of his father during his adolescence. Singh writes the article, easily and dishonestly, and with the publication of the anniversary issue of the "Socialist" a political movement is born; it quickly gathers force, and in no time Singh and Browne found themselves 'at the centre less of a political awakening than a political anxiety, to which it was left to us merely to give direction' (p. 226).

Singh lays no claim to political astuteness, and he attributes none to Browne. The phenomenal success of their movement, he explains, lies in the nature of the political life of the island, in the particular strategy they use, and in the formidable combination he and Browne make:

> We were a colony, a benevolently administered dependency. So long as our dependence remained unquestioned our politics were a joke. A man like my father, extravagant as he was, had been a passing disturber of the peace. He fitted into the pattern of dependence, as did those who came after him, taking advantage of the limited constitution we were granted just before the end of the war. These politicians were contractors and merchants in the towns, farmers in the country, small people offering no policies, offering only themselves. They were not highly regarded. Their names and photographs appeared frequently in the newspapers, but they were slightly ridiculous figures; stories about their illiteracy or crookedness constantly circulated.
>
> To go into politics then was not as simple a decision as it might seem now. We might easily have made the error of appearing to compete with the established politicians. And that would have been disastrous. We would have covered ourselves with ridicule. Instead, we ignored them. We said they were dead and unimportant. We not only made public a public joke; we were a demonstration of what was desirable and possible. We had the resources, in intellect and offers of support, to question the system itself. We denied competition; and indeed there was none. Simply by coming forward -- Browne and myself and "The Socialist," all together -- we put an end to the old order.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 227)

The campaign for general elections, which Singh spearheads, proves equally successful; it leads inevitably to victory at the polls. Browne is made Chief Minister and Singh becomes Minister of Agriculture.

'Power came easily; it took me by surprise. It filled me with a degree of tremulousness which more than anything else unfitted me for the position I found myself called upon to hold' (p. 45). So writes Singh in the early part of the narrative. Later, when a crisis occurs in the Sugar industry, Singh realizes how feeble is the power of the colonial politician:

> It was part of our innocence that at the beginning we should have considered applause and the smell of sweat as the only source of power. It took us no time to see that we depended on what was no more than a mob, and that our hold on the mob was the insecure one of words. I went a little beyond this. I saw that in our situation the mob, without skills, was unproductive, offered nothing, was in the end without power. The mob might burn down the city. But the mob is shot down, and the power of money will cause the city to be built again. In the moment of victory we had wondered why no one had called our bluff. Soon we saw that there had been no need, that our power was air. We had no trade unions behind us, no organized capital. We had no force of nationalism even, only the negative frenzy of a deep violation which could lead to further frenzy alone, the vision of the world going up in flames: it was the only expiation.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 245)

Although Singh intellectually apprehends the empty power of the colonial politician, it is not until he meets the London Minister in a brief exchange on the subject of nationalization of the sugar industry in Isabella that he is given a dramatic expression of it:

> It was a brief, humiliating meeting. This man, whom in other, humbler capacities I had met more than once before on various government trips to London and had thought affable and slightly foolish, now barely had time for courtesies. His manner indicated clearly that our game had gone on long enough and he had other things to do than to assist the public relations of colonial politicians. In about forty-five seconds he painted so lively a picture of the consequences of any intemperate action by the government of Isabella that I felt personally rebuked.
>
> Then I spoke the sentence which tormented me almost as soon as I said it. It was this which no doubt made the interview so painful in recollection. I said, 'How can I take this message back to my people?' 'My people': for that I deserve all I got. He said: 'You can take back to your people any message you like.' And that was the end.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 268)

The end, indeed, in more ways than one!

Singh remains in London for two weeks while the rest of the delegation returns home. He spends this time in bed with Lady Stella and in touring the city, and when the time comes for him to go, 'to leave the city of fantasy; to leave the fairyland of the hotel, no longer fairyland' (p. 277), he tries to delay his departure as long as possible:

> I wish only to delay it, to make a detour, to have a momentary escape. To recover my calm and that limpid vision of the world: this was now all my concern. Everything else dwindled: Stella, Isabella and what awaited me there. I was a student in the city again. I needed new sights, new landscapes, an unfamiliar language. Northern Spain in a snowstorm, the brown earth whitening, the light suddenly grey; Provence on a sunny morning, green and yellow and hazy, the big Wagon-Lit coffee cup kept steady by a heavy spoon.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 279)

This is probably one of the most moving passages in the book. But it is a circumstantial response, 'the familiar switchback of neurosis' (p. 278). Time and time again, ever since his return to Isabella, Singh reasserts his wish not to experience new landscapes, and by the time he comes to write his memoir, he is able to say: 'I no longer dream of ideal landscapes or seek to attach myself to them. All landscapes eventually turn to land, the gold of the imagination to the lead of reality' (p. 13).

Singh enters Isabella quietly, and swiftly makes his way home. Later when his arrival is known, a meeting is held, and a case is made out against him:

> My private life -- my methodical making of money, the racial exclusiveness of my development at Crippleville, my marriage to Sandra, my relationship with Wendy, my escapade with Stella -- all this was used to heighten the picture

> of my public imposture. I had sold out on the nationalization issue; it was my playboy attitude to distress. At the same time my steady advocacy of nationalization, of benefits mainly to Asiatics, had been an attempt to create racial divisions to ensure my own continued power. My attitude to distress had always been equivocal. I had joined the movement, had helped to create it, only to destroy what it stood for. I had even tried to gain control of the police and had secretly recommended that it should remain under British control. It was a massive charge, as I say. In the hysteria of a public meeting it must have been overwhelming. It could not be answered reasonably, and from a position of weakness, because it contained too many points of truth. It could be answered only with a challenge, and from a position of strength.
>
> (The Mimic Men, pp. 285-86)

Singh has had the opportunity to gain this position of strength (see p. 263); but he allows it, like so many opportunities, to slip away: 'Crunch-time came in Isabella and I was the one to go. I went like a lamb. I blame no one. It was left to me to act, and I didn't. I held a good many of the cards. I threw them away. My behaviour seemed logical enough to me at the time. Now it seems irresponsible' (p. 245). By the time Singh learns the politician's lesson of survival and the consolidation of power, he 'had ceased to care' (p. 229):

> A man, I suppose, fights only when he hopes, when he has a vision of order, when he feels strongly there is some connection between the earth on which he walks and himself. But there was my vision of a disorder which it was beyond any one man to put right. There was my sense of wrongness, beginning the stillness of that morning of return when I looked out on the slave island and tried to pretend it was mine. There was my sense of intrusion which deepened as I felt my power to be more and more a matter of words. So defiantly, in my mind, I asserted my character as intruder, the picturesque Asiatic born for other landscapes.
>
> (The Mimic Men, p. 248)

With this feeling of absolute alienation from the land in which he was born, it is not surprising that Singh prefers to go into exile rather than stay in Isabella.

Of late, The Mimic Men has attracted considerable critical attention; many of the commentaries, however, tend to ignore the texture of the fictional world of the novel and focus on its socio-political relevance to the real world from which it draws its material. Karl Miller, for example, argues that Naipaul simplifies the West Indian political situation in the book. Miller fears that the readers 'who are not acquainted with Trinidad will be reluctant to judge Naipaul's successive pictures of graft and futile enthusiasm.'[9] Like Miller, Peter Nazareth sees The Mimic Men as essentially a political novel in which Naipaul presents 'a cynical view of politics.'[10] Miller and Nazareth also do not sufficiently distinguish Singh from Naipaul, and are too prone to attribute to the author statements made by the narrator. This is a problem that often arises in first-person narratives, and is an especially delicate one in The Mimic Men. Singh and Naipaul do share recognizable sensibilities, but it is a mistake to confuse the two.

The failure of both these critics to respond to The Mimic Men as an imaginative work of literature, and not as a political document, recalls an observation made some years ago by Kenneth Ramchand: 'For non-West Indian critics, difficulties might well lie not so much in judging these works parochial as in becoming too engrossed in the raw material to apply critical standards.'[11] Ramchand has not written on The Mimic Men, but in a bibliographical review he describes the novel as 'a repetitive and superficial satire.'[12] It is true that the rhythm of the novel is repetitive and some of its satirical touches now seem threadbare, but the criticism is much too harsh and it hardly does justice to the fine control Naipaul maintains throughout the work, and the sharp insights he offers on the West Indian situation. Victor Ramraj comes closer to the intention of the novel when he says that Naipaul 'is interested in a study of the unanchored, estranged individual than with the issues of politics.'[13] But even Ramraj is not altogether correct in his interpretation. Politics is not a peripheral concern in the novel; it is quite central to the experience Naipaul wishes to communicate. Naipaul uses politics to show that the West Indian, already a victim of historical and cultural discontinuity, does not even possess the political power to order his own destiny.

To turn from The Mimic Men to An Absence of Ruins is to move from a novel deeply rooted in West Indian realities to one in which the author merely uses the West Indian setting and characters to give expression to his belief in the absurdity of the human condition. If we substitute the phrase 'philosophical vision' for 'moral consciousness,' we can reorient the remarks Henry James made on George Eliot and her creative method and apply them to Patterson: 'We feel in her, always, that she proceeds from the abstract to the concrete; that her figures and situations are evolved, as the phrase is, from her moral consciousness, and are only indirectly the products of observations.'[14]

The formal organization of An Absence of Ruins appears to derive from Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground: the narrative consists of excerpts taken from a diary in which Blackman examines his actions. But Patterson does not wholly relinquish all authority in the novel: from time to time he enters in the voice of the omniscient author to supplement the first person narrative. The use of 'a first person narrative in a confidential diary form,' argues Bridget Jones, constitutes an attempt by the author to 'counteract the potential aridity' of 'a novel based on the philosopher's technique of methodological doubt.'[15] This may well be the case, whatever it means. But it seems to me that Patterson wants to present the experience of the novel from a position of detachment. The use of Blackman as the principal narrator provides him with this aesthetic distance; at the same time, the device allows Patterson to deflect attention from his philosophy, of which so much has already been said since the appearance of The Children of Sisyphus, to the thoughts and actions of the character, who nonetheless embodies his philosophy. To put it this way is to suggest that Patterson is more exploratory than doctrinal in the presentation of the theme of the novel. The strategy works.

In the opening pages of An Absence, Patterson establishes the nature of his hero, his loneliness and alienation, and his identification with the dry, barren landscape that objectifies his spiritual aridity:

> The grass in the garden had withered away. The earth was parched and cracked. Stiff, dead leaves lay about, brown as the earth and motionless. The roots of the tree, though hoary, appeared strong and secure, as if they were fixed there for eternity. I turned my stare from the roots to the dry patch of land that was once a green lawn. With that I felt more familiar. The harsh, brown, dusty aridity of everything there seem to meet some vague yet deeply embedded demand in me. It was with difficulty that I prevented myself from falling to the ground and wallowing all over in it. Little dry lot of land hemmed in by the thorny hedges, I thought to myself with tenderness. Somehow I seem to have found a momentary security there -- there, in the bare, dry nakedness of everything.
>
> (An Absence of Ruins, p. 13)

Similarly, Blackman identifies with the searing hot sun and the stark intense clarity of the sky: 'I love them. I was obsessed with them even if they inspired nothing but the desire to escape from them' (p. 14).

This kind of perversity, if we may use the word, informs all of Blackman's actions. In Chapter I Patterson shows Blackman in several situations in which the character craves an experience but at the moment of fulfilment he freezes and even becomes nauseous. Blackman's thirst for a beer, for example, grows increasingly insatiable as each moment passes; yet when he drinks the beer he spews it out in disgust. Similarly, detumescence follows his desire for a prostitute when she lies under him (see pp. 23-24). So it is also with his visit to the sea: anticipation builds up as he approaches the sea, but no sooner does he become conscious of its presence than he feels a compulsive urge to leave.

It is reasonable to assume that Blackman finds greater satisfaction in the contemplation of an experience than in the actual experience itself, and to some extent this is true: an awareness of the creative power of the imagination interferes with his ability to function in action. But this is not the whole truth: 'Confrontation,' Blackman tells us, 'terrifies me with the fear of the failure of experience. So I must escape from what I anticipate at once' (p. 15). On a first reading, the explanation of this paradox seems obvious enough: Blackman withdraws from an object he desires simply because he fears that it may not measure up to the intensity of his expectation. But once we have read the whole novel, we return to the paradox, only to discover that Patterson invests in it a philosophical significance that holds the key to our understanding of Blackman and his quest for existential freedom. From the longer perspective we come to see that Blackman recoils from an experience not only because he fears a deflation of his expectancy, but also, and perhaps more importantly, because he wishes to avoid any kind of involvement that threatens to deprive him of his separate existence: 'Separation must be caught before it catches up with me' (p. 15).

Blackman has become fixated on the question of existential freedom; it has become an obsession with him, so much so that it informs all his actions and relationships; and to preserve this freedom Blackman will stop at nothing. It is, for example, in the name of existential freedom, we are told, that he left his wife, Pauline, and, in that very name, he began to live with Elaine, an English girl, while he was in England. Both women, in their own ways, had come to love Blackman to a degree that he felt was a threat to his individuality. With Pauline, it was a straightforward case of emotional and psychological parasitism. Blackman provided her with the kind of security she needed to shield her from 'the closeness, the narrowness, the hopeless provinciality and shallowness' of the island life, which she has come to fear, and from which there is no escape 'either in the illusions on the surface, or the vacuum below' (p. 85). In contrast, Elaine loved Blackman in a selfless way, and in turn, as Blackman explains to Pauline, he loved her 'as a person and yet not deny myself of the need for constant disengagement' (p. 38):

> 'Crazy as it may sound, I loved her because she was the only woman who ever offered me the possibility of unattached involvement. She was always a thing apart. . . . With her I could be immediately involved yet ultimately unattached. And she made this easier for me by the quality of her own personality. For she remained a long time independent of me, despite her love.'
>
> (An Absence, pp. 38-9)

But the time came when this relationship of mutual independence began to show signs of emotional dependence, and in typical fashion Blackman broke away:

> 'We just reached a point where I could feel shades of dependence, and even worse, of commitment, creeping in. I'm not sure whether it was she who was becoming dependent on me, or me on her, or the both of us on each other. All I know is that there were moments when I could sense the same horrifying sense of commitment which I used to feel in relation to you.'
>
> (An Absence, p. 40)

If Blackman cannot remember whether it was he or it was Elaine who began to grow dependent, in the brief affair he has with Carmen, Patterson leaves us in no doubt. Blackman describes the early days of the relationship as idyllic:

> There were beautiful days. They were careless days. Irresponsible days. Days of idleness. Days without thought. Days devoid of anticipation, contemptuous of the future. Days without memory, oblivious of the past. Each moment was taken for what it was, accepted on its own terms, rejected on its own terms.
>
> (An Absence, p. 72)

But this ecstasy too does not last long, only this time it is Carmen who promptly ends the affair when Blackman, who had deserted wife and girl friend because they sought to undermine his autonomy of existence, now attempts to pressure her into making some form of commitment: 'I sought, despite myself, to place our relationship in time, within meaning, to give it some direction' (p. 77).

While Patterson brings Carmen into the novel to expose the inherent dishonesty in his hero, he also uses the girl to force Blackman to recognize his human nature and to awaken in him a sense of moral responsibility:

> What we experienced could only continue as long as we remained detached, uninvolved, absolutely honest. This came naturally with her, and I suppose what she enjoyed most in me was the fact that for once she had met someone who seemed to have had the same approach. But I'm more human, I suppose, than I had thought. Detachment, with me, can only be the clearing ground for something else; something I want, but do not know of.
>
> (An Absence, p. 76)

The loss of Carmen does not bother Blackman very much; yet it is after her departure that he seems to lose anchorage, and begins to drift. One day we see him at the market place; another at a mountain village. Then, after a desperate and futile attempt to rediscover and make meaningful his past (see pp. 112-118), Blackman gives up, and concludes what has always been implicit in his

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behaviour and actions that his existence precedes his essence:

> I come before history, I come before race, I come before culture, I come before parents, I come before God.
>
> (An Absence, p. 122)

But this fierce insistence on his existential freedom brings no solace to Blackman; who he really is still eludes him:

> All that I know is that I was, that I am ever passing, that I am always on the point of catching up with myself, the thing that lives, the moment now. But always it seems too late. Always I keep yearning to be what I am, but never was.
>
> (An Absence, p. 123)

It is difficult to imagine a more absurd condition than the one in which Patterson places his hero; nor is it any wonder that Blackman decides that suicide is the only conceivable solution to his dissociation:

> Suddenly he could write no more. He flung his diary from him in disgust and got up. Something had to be done. He couldn't continue like this. His thoughts, his feelings, his entire being had arrived at a dead end and it was no longer possible to evade the fact. He would act. Some decision had to be made, some final plunge taken.
>
> And the only one which both reason and emotion demanded was an end to everything. It was quite clear that there was no point going on any more. Suicide was the only answer. He would drown himself. He had always feared and been fascinated by the idea of drowning, of being swallowed up by the ocean; and he would do so now. There was no longer any point in asking why. The time for such asking had already passed. The act of suicide was self-explanatory. He felt suddenly that he deserved to die. Yes, he wanted to die.
>
> (An Absence, p. 123)

But Blackman is not Mathieu Delarue, the absurd hero in Sartre's Les Chemins de la Liberté; despite his resolution to end it all, the West Indian, unlike the Frenchman, who decides upon action and acts upon his decision, although by doing so he assures his death, cannot bring himself to commit suicide; his love for life proves much stronger than his wish to die:

> He stood staring at the water from the edge of the quay. Once more he began to feel the growing sense of self-mockery which sprang from his confrontation with his impossible dishonesty. In his attempt at resolving everything he had once more made what amounted to simply another wild, extravagant, squalid, idiotic gesture. Suicide, death, was the very last thing he desired. Nobody could have loved life as much as he did. It was his very passion for life which led him to make his impossible demands on it. And it was his inevitable disatisfaction [sic] which in turn led him to question the very basis of the life which he desired so much, which he wanted so desperately to give some meaning, to make reasonable and unambiguous.
>
> (An Absence, pp. 124-25)

The scene which follows reveals a comic side of Patterson that we have not seen before, and a sense of humour in Alexander Blackman that we would never suspect. The commotion which Blackman stirs when he flings himself into the sea only as a gesture awakes the nightwatchman:

> 'A who dat? A who dat? Talk quick or I shoot to kill!' he shouted.
> 'It's only me,' Alexander answered, rather lamely.
> 'Me who?'
> 'Me, Alexander Blackman.'
> 'And what the rass you doing here? Don't you know is private property?'
> 'I was only trying to kill myself.'
> 'Trying to do wharra?'
> 'You heard what I said: take that damn' light out of my eyes.'
> 'Trying to kill yourself? You take me for some damn' fool?'
> 'Not you; myself.'
> 'Well then, you goin' to pay for your foolhardiness. Ah tekin' you to de water-police station. Move!'
> 'Good Lord,' Alex said, looking down at himself, 'I'm wet.'
> 'What de 'ell you expec'? You must be outa you' mind! Come on.'

> 'I guess they'll have some spare clothes at the station.'
>
> 'I'm sure they will. Now you come on.'
>
> (An Absence, pp. 125-26)

Thrown in jail to cool off, Blackman reflects upon the motive for his recent flirtation with death, and arrives at this conclusion:

> It was not himself really whom he wanted to hurt, but those others. If he had killed himself he would have made them all sorry; he would have made the whole world sorry. By committing suicide he would have singled out himself as one of those few who had suffered more, much more than the ordinary human lot. It was not so much their pity that he needed, but their guilt, their remorse at what they had done to him. Suicide would have been the final, decisive statement absolving him of all responsibility, of all guilt, while at the same time, making them all responsible and guilty for him and his fate.
>
> (An Absence, pp. 126-27)

It is in keeping with the portrait that Patterson has drawn of Blackman that the character, at the end of his reflection, should strike upon a plan that will allow him, to employ an aphorism that he uses time and time again in his narrative to describe his response to life, to have his cake and eat it. By faking his death, Blackman figures he can still be the scourge of 'their' conscience:

> Why not, he thought, enjoy the very human pleasures of suicide without suffering the un-human price of it? Why not simply pretend to commit suicide? Yes, by God, he should have thought of that before. He would make them all suffer yet; he would make them all responsible yet. He would spare none of them. His mother, perhaps? No! No! She least of all. Furthermore, he felt confident that she could take it. She had not struggled through life all these years for nothing. He would be merciless. He, Alexander Blackman, would pass judgement on the whole world. And they shall be punished in their guilt.
>
> (An Absence, p. 128)

Blackman lives and relives in his imagination the effects he hopes the news of his 'death' will have on his mother, wife, and friends. But it never occurs to him that his self-indulgence may result in tragedy. It is only when he learns that his mother has collapsed and died from the shock and strain of his reported suicide that the cruelty of his 'exercise in baseness' fully dawns upon him and reveals to him the fraudulence of his whole approach to life:

> At last I am exposed. Her death has filled me with shame. And my shame has exposed me to what I really am. For suddenly it has betrayed my guiltlessness. Me, of all persons. My guilt with which I was so obsessed, which had become the pivot of my being, I now see as a sham. I even begin to doubt whether it was ever there. This, perhaps, was the real absence, the hidden emptiness which lay behind everything. And what a fool I was not to have known it. To think, not only did I fail to recognise its absence, but had fooled myself into thinking that it formed the essence of my being. I who sought never to be excused had created this great fiction of my life to excuse everything.
>
> (An Absence, p. 153)

Only now does Blackman realize what Patterson has dramatically shown all through the novel, and which is explicitly stated at one point: 'In life, in his confrontation with all the perplexities it had to offer, he was prepared to be the coward, to opt out of everything, to accept responsibility only for himself, and to be responsible only to himself' (p. 127).

Ridden with guilt and embarrassed by his knowledge that he is nothing more than a 'squalid, incongruous fool' (p. 155), Blackman wishes for escape and oblivion:

> Is there no place where I can hide? Is there no dark jungle among whose tangled trees I can get myself lost for ever? Is there no vast, indifferent horde somewhere amongst which I can sink and drown in anonymity?
>
> (An Absence, p. 155)

The mention of 'dark jungle' and 'tangled trees' is perhaps a subtle reference to the climax of Williams's Other Leopards, and it is quite possible that Patterson wants us to make a connection between the condition of his hero and Froad. However this may be, Patterson does not lose Blackman in a dark jungle, only in the city of London, where, as 'a faceless figure, gaunt, mute and mechanical in movement,' he slinks along 'the foggy shadows of some narrow, grey-bricked alley' (p. 159), a man completely devoid of essence.

At the end of the novel, Patterson contrives to give Blackman the opportunity to declare the condition of his existence. To a curious native, who wants to know what manner of man Blackman is, the West Indian replies:

> 'I come from nowhere worth mentioning. I have no past, except the haunting recollection of each passing moment which comes to me always as something having lost. My ancestors, if they existed, left no record of themselves; my mother who also fathered me, I sacrificed to a futile cause many shameful years ago. If I appear to be like you, please understand that it is out of no vain wish to be identified with you, but out of the simple desire not to draw attention to myself. I cannot say whether I am civilised or savage, standing as I do outside of race, outside of culture, outside of history, outside of any value that could make your question meaningful. I am busy going nowhere, but I must keep up the appearance of going in order to forget that I am not. So if you'll excuse me, I will be on my way.'
>
> (An Absence, p. 160)

Patterson observes that Blackman, with a vacant, remote look in his eyes, speaks 'in a voice devoid of all emotion,' presumably to underscore the emotional and spiritual emptiness of the character. But the pretentiousness of the reply makes it hard for us to sympathize with Blackman.

An Absence of Ruins is an atypical West Indian novel that does not quite succeed. To begin with, the work is self-consciously cerebral both in its conception and execution, and the central character strains our credibility both in his oppressive consciousness of his need for existential independence and his intellectual expression of it. We seem unable to identify with Blackman in the way we do, for example, with Mark Kennedy, who is also conceived and presented as an existential hero. Lamming succeeds where Patterson fails partly because he carefully and gradually establishes Kennedy as a figure of malaise, and partly because he allows the character to express his alienation in dramatic terms and with hesitation. Mark does not know what really ails him. But the major weakness of An Absence of Ruins lies in the confusion of intention. Throughout the novel, Patterson approvingly allows Blackman to dismiss his lack of historical and cultural continuity as the source of his distress; yet, as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o quite rightly says: 'What ails him however is not a true existential anguish but the absence of a cultural stream to which he is heir.'[16] An Absence of Ruins would have been a much better novel had Patterson decided, instead, to satirize either Blackman or the West Indian excessive preoccupation with cultural loss. Apparently, he too chose to have his cake and eat it.

At this point in the examination of the subject of this chapter, it may give pause to notice that the protagonists in all of the novels come to a dismal or unhappy end: Ramsay Tull in The Last Enchantment, we may recall, suffers a nervous breakdown no sooner he returns to Jamaica, and in The Adventures of Catullus Kelly, the titular hero goes mad shortly after his arrival in the same island; in Of Age and Innocence, an ironic train of events leads to the murder of Isaac Shephard, and Mark Kennedy flees from San Cristobal, to which he had come to find the answer to his alienation, emotionally and spiritually dead, bound for nowhere in particular and with no place to which he may return; in The Mimic Men, Singh is driven into exile after his fall from political power; and in An Absence of Ruins, Blackman's obsession with his ontological existence results in some absurd and bizarre acts, and in his flight to London where he is shown as a spectral figure, dead to the world and, possibly, mad. None of these characters manages to settle down and lead a normal life in his native society, and in their failure, their creators seem to be giving expression to the notion that one never really returns nor can ever return. However, not all West Indian writers, who choose to fictionalize the experiences of West Indians who return to their home countries subscribe to this notion. One notable exception is Claude McKay, and it is with his novel Banana Bottom (1933) that one may conclude this chapter.

Written at a time when the West Indian novel was in its embryonic stage, Banana Bottom survives as a remarkable work in the exploration of the theme of 'cultural dualism.'[17] McKay has written on this theme before in both Home to Harlem (1928) and Banjo (1929). But it is not until his third novel that McKay finally discovers a form that allows him to realize fully his main artistic concern. The narrative action of Banana Bottom revolves around the central character, Bita Plant, a peasant girl, who after several years abroad at an exclusive finishing school and on continental Europe, returns to her native island of Jamaica, an educated, refined, and elegant young lady. The conflicts which result from her dual cultural upbringing constitute the dramatic substance of Banana Bottom.

Bita receives a warm, communal welcome on her arrival home. The Reverend Malcolm Craig and his wife, Priscilla are especially proud of her. Bita is their protegé. They had adopted her ever since she was raped at the age of thirteen by Crazy Bow, the mentally deficient musical wonder of the village of Banana Bottom. As part of a continuing process of reconstruction, the Craigs had sent Bita to England, where she could obtain the kind of education and sensibility that would alienate her from the 'vulgar' ways of her folk, and assure her of social mobility: 'Priscilla Craig had conceived the idea of redeeming her from her past by a long period of education without any contact with Banana Bottom, and at the finish she would be English trained and appearing in everything but the colour of her skin' (p. 31). McKay makes it quite clear that the Craigs look upon Bita as the subject of an experiment in cultural transplantation; he consistently describes their attitude to Bita in agricultural imagery: 'They were happy in a praise-Godly humble way over their handiwork. The transplanted African peasant girl that they had transformed from a brown wildling into a decorous cultivated young lady. Bita was one precious flowering of a great work' (p. 11). McKay is unmistakably ironic in his tone, and the implication that the missionaries regard Bita as a piece of crude material which they have shaped into an artifact for exhibition is equally inescapable. The Craigs never consider Bita as a person with an independent mind of her own, and it is in this absence of a human response to the peasant girl that McKay locates the failure of their experiment.

The transformation which the Craigs imagine they have effected in Bita proves deceptive. The success of the grand plans for her social elevation depended largely on her willingness to share their prudish social values. The possibility that Bita might cultivate values of her own had never entered into their calculations. They were confident that her exposure abroad would engender in her the same kind of contemptuous response which educated West Indians show towards their native societies when they return home: 'Many young natives had gone to the city or abroad for higher culture and had returned aloof from, if not actually despising, the tribal life in which they were nurtured' (p. 41). But Bita is not the typical West Indian who returns home with a pretentious air and an aspiration to middle-class gentility. McKay endows his heroine with a strength of character and an integrity that resists corruption. Her education abroad has been a liberating experience, and her long absence, designed to wean her from her native culture, only serves, ironically, to heighten her appreciation of it when she renews contact with it:

> Bita mingled in the crowd, responsive to the feeling, the colour, the smell, the swell, and press of it. It gave her the sensation of a reservoir of familiar kindred humanity into which she had descended for baptism. She had never had that big moving feeling as a girl when she visited the native market. And she thought that if she had never gone abroad for a period so long, from which she had become accustomed to viewing her native life in perspective, she might never had had that experience.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 40)

In this paragraph, McKay gives us much more than a description of the pleasurable sensations which the bustling market-place evokes in his heroine; the passage is dramatically functional in the sense that it cryptically announces the failure of the Craigs' strategy to deculturalize Bita. But it is worth noting that McKay does not allow the character to interpret her response to the 'simple life of her girlhood' (p. 41) as a survival of the village impact within her; instead, he makes the tingling joy that Bita experiences operate on an emotional level: 'She could not reason and theorize why she felt that way. It was just a surging free big feeling' (p. 41). In this way, McKay manages to initiate a dramatic process and at the same time maintains psychological plausibility in the characterization of Bita.

From this point the dramatic structure of Banana Bottom begins to take definite shape. The conflict between Bita and Mrs. Craig, which we have by this time come to expect, materializes, and as the novel progresses, it gets worse and worse until it leads to a complete break in their relationship. It begins with a rather trivial incident: Priscilla Craig objects to a casual association that Bita strikes up with Hopping Dick, a charming but shady character. The emphasis which Mrs. Craig places on the proper behaviour that Bita must exemplify because of her association with the mission causes Bita to examine the situation in which she finds herself: 'She wondered, now that she had come home to it after all the years of training, if she would be able to adjust herself to the life of the mission' (p. 45). Later that night, as the significance of her clash with Priscilla crystallizes in her mind, Bita tries to view her life in perspective:

> That night Bita . . . lay thinking about herself and her future. Everybody among the natives, from her father down, thought it was a magnificent and unique chance for her to have been adopted and given a high-class education and come back to the Jubilee Mission practically the heiress of the Craigs. But she was full of doubt about her future. Would she be able to stand that spiritual atmosphere -- go through with what was expected of her and finally reap the material reward? There was that talk about Herald Newton Day. Would she like him enough to marry him? And would she be able to live with satisfaction the life of the mission? There was no doubt that Mrs. Craig had her own rigid ideas about the correct things that she should do. Would she be able to live up to them?
>
> (Banana Bottom, pp. 46-7)

Bita is quite obviously a very disturbed young lady. But it is the manner in which McKay communicates her agitation that impresses us: the easy rhythm of the opening sentences of the passage yields to a rapid sequence of crisp, interrogative queries, as Bita mentally scans the horizon of her future. The core of her reflection centres on her doubtful ability to cope with the pressure of a way of life the Craigs map out for her.

It is only natural that Bita should go to Banana Bottom as soon as possible. But such is the economy of Banana Bottom that McKay makes her visit coincide with the artistic need to relieve the tension at Jubilee and, perhaps more importantly, to allow Bita to affirm her cultural integrity.

The village of Banana Bottom rests on the side of a hill that slopes down gently to the Cane River. Its fertile lands yield a variety of rich crops and an abundance of lush vegetation. Essentially an agricultural community, the peasants share their labour as well as their pleasures. Harvesting crops is as much a communal affair as social gatherings. McKay describes both activities with affection, but it is his presentation of the spontaneity and lack of self-consciousness with which the simple village people respond to life that comes through more strongly in the novel. In Banana Bottom McKay is as intent, as he was in Home to Harlem and Banjo, to celebrate the virtues of an instinctive approach to life, and in Bita he finds the ideal character to embody his views.

Bita re-enters the world of her childhood with ease. Her lack of affectation scores heavily in her favour with the village folk, in whose eyes 'she was now a grand lady who had been to the high white folk's country and was learned in their ways, just like one of them with only the difference of pigmentation' (p. 51). Away from the regimented life of the mission, Bita requires little persuasion to attend Kojo Jeens' tea-meeting, and once there the urge to enter into the spirit of the evening possesses her:

> Her body was warm and willing for that native group dancing. It came more natural to her than the waltzes and minuets, although she liked these too in a more artificial atmosphere.
>
> And Bab was surprised when he came by that Bita grabbed his arm and joined the dance. Now the line-up was merged into a grand altogether breakdown and Bita danced freely released, dance as she had never danced since she was a girl at a picnic at Tabletop, wiggling and swaying and sliding along, the memories of her tomboyish girlhood rushing sparkling over her like water cascading over one bathing upon a hot summer's day.
>
> The crowd rejoiced to see her dance and some girls stood clapping and stamping to her measure and crying: "Dance, Miss Bita, dance you' step! Dance, Miss Bita, dance away!" And she danced forgetting herself, forgetting even Jubilee, dancing down the barrier between high breeding and common pleasures under her light stamping feet until she was one with the crowd.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 84)

As with the market scene, so it is with the dance: McKay invests in it a significance that transcends the wonderful emotional release which Bita experiences. On the one hand, Bita's willing participation in the festivity represents a symbolic victory for her native cultural upbringing; on the other, it becomes the occasion for another confrontation with Priscilla Craig.

To forestall any further lapse, the Craigs decide that it would be a 'wise step if Bita were married as soon as possible' (p. 94), and the man they choose for her is no other than Herald Newton Day, another of their experimental subjects. But McKay has other plans for Bita, which do not include Day, whose presence in the novel is merely to serve as a dramatic foil to Bita. Pompous and full of self-importance, Day, a student at a local theological College, aspires to succeed the Reverend Malcolm Craig and become the first black Minister at Jubilee. McKay depicts Day as a young man completely devoid of sensibility and incapable of independent thought and action. Day osmotically absorbs the word of the white man, and panders to the wishes of the Craigs. Day feels that his success would be complete if he were to have a white woman by his side, with '"a pure mind and lofty ideas like Mrs. Craig"' (p. 100). But since there is only one Priscilla Craig, he has to be satisfied with Bita who has been trained '"like a pure-minded white lady"' (p. 100). To hear Day talk is to listen all over again to the smug and self-righteous Mr. Collins of Pride and Prejudice.

Despite her growing revulsion for Day, Bita feels an obligation to the Craigs to accept his proposal of marriage:

> But if she could just like him even, she thought, since it would please the Craigs for them to marry. And no doubt the families on both sides. But principally because it would please the Craigs she was inclined to do it, for they had made her what she was.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 100)

But since, as Ramchand points out, 'the plot demands that Herald Newton should be removed from the scene,'[18] the reader does not fear that Bita will be saddled to Day. The manner, however, in which McKay disposes of the character indicates either a failure of the creative imagination or authorial animosity: 'Herald Newton Day . . . descended from the dizzy heights of holiness to the very bottom of the beast' (p. 175). The pun on the word 'bottom' makes the nature of the defilement clear. Day is quietly and quickly rushed out of the country, and out of Bita's life.

The disgrace of Herald Newton affects the Craigs severely: Malcolm is acutely disappointed, but Priscilla is inconsolable. She becomes hard, bitter, and pessimistic:

> "I feel that our work here is wasted," she said, huskily, from vexation of the spirit. "All our giving freely of our money and ourselves. Spending, planning, building -- all broken down and buried in the mire. I shall not do any more. I have lost faith."
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 178)

Yet there is a certain dignity in Priscilla Craig as she turns from the study 'with a firm vertical march on to the veranda' (p. 179), where she stands 'erect' and gazes steadily beyond the market over the town.

No mention is made of Day when Bita returns to Jubilee. She simply resumes her life at the mission, but her relationship with Mrs. Craig steadily declines; it reaches a critical point when Hopping Dick once again enters the scene and becomes the occasion for a final, bitter clash between Bita and Mrs. Craig. Mrs. Craig's disapproval of Bita's friendship with the dandy is not the real reason for the quarrel, and Bita knows this, just as she knows that her antagonism towards her benefactress goes much deeper:

> A latent hostility would make her always want to do anything of which Mrs. Craig disapproved. Bita could not quite explain this strong feeling to herself. It was just there, going much deeper than the Hopping Dick affair. Maybe it was an old unconscious thing now manifesting itself, because it was to Mrs. Craig, a woman whose attitude of life was alien to hers, and not to her parents, she owed the entire shaping of her career.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 211)

Whatever may be the source of her hostility to Mrs. Craig, Bita is quite certain that she cannot stay much longer at the mission. A long reflection on her situation ends in an aggressive action that symbolizes her irrevocable renunciation of the constrictive mission way of life:

> She became contemptuous of everything -- the plan of her education and the way of existence at the mission, and her eye wandering to the photograph of her English College over her bed, she suddenly took and ripped it from its frame, tore the thing up and trampled the pieces under her feet. . . .
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 212)

With this gesture of independence, Bita proceeds to defy the wishes of Mrs. Craig openly. More out of a perverse desire to aggravate the older woman than any real affection for Hopping Dick, Bita flagrantly flaunts her friendship with the dandy. The final result of Bita's campaign against Mrs. Craig amounts to a virtual victory for her. When Priscilla Craig sends the following telegram to Jordan Plant, "Bita ruining her reputation with a worthless man, Please come at once," it is less of a desperate measure to protect Bita, and more of an admission of defeat:

> In sending the telegram Mrs. Craig felt convinced that it was impossible now for Bita to continue living at the mission, whether she stopped her nonsense with Hopping Dick or not. The differences between them and the encounters had been so sharp that the even rhythm of the mission-house had become broken and upset. Bita could never again take the place in that life that Mrs. Craig had made and reserved for her. Mrs. Craig could never now accept her as her own daughter in Christ. She realized that her experiment had failed. And so her telegram was really a command to Jordan to come and take his child.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 219)

The implications of the telegram do not escape Jordan Plant. The situation, he realizes, requires tact and diplomacy; so he sends Anty Nommy, and the way she handles the crisis justifies his confidence in her. In quick order, Anty Nommy disposes of Hopping Dick, cures Bita of her infatuation, and wins the admiration of Mrs. Craig. It is hard not to feel that McKay intends the *savoir faire* and native intelligence with which Anty Nommy handles the whole affair to serve as an example of the potential resources of the village folk. Anty Nommy, however, could not heal the breach that has developed between Bita and Mrs. Craig; the gulf that separates the two women has now become too wide. On the next day, she takes Bita home with her.

The events which constitute the final movement of *Banana Bottom* may be said to form a tame epilogue to the high dramatic action that sustains the earlier parts of the novel. Committed to an artistic affirmation of the supremacy of a natural approach to life, McKay proceeds to re-integrate Bita, after her removal from the artificial environment of the Jubilee Mission, into the culture of her childhood. But since Bita has already shown that her long absence from Banana Bottom has not made her a stranger to the ways of the folk, the process of reintegration presents no problem. Away from the oppressive atmosphere of the mission, Bita flourishes under the enlightening tutelage of Squire Gensir. She grows even more sensitive to indigenous values of her people, increasingly appreciative of their simple pleasures, and develops more confidence in her personal identity. With Day and Dick no longer in the running, Bita marries Jubban, the strong, inarticulate drayman, who works for her father. It is keeping with his celebration of the vitality of the instinctive life that McKay allows Bita to come to know the true meaning of love when she voluntarily surrenders to Jubban in response to her natural urges, even before they are married, and in the presence of death:

> . . . Bita in Jubban's embrace was overwhelmed with a feeling as if she were upon the threshold of a sacrament and she yielded up herself to him there in the bed of the dray. It was strange and she was aware of the strangeness that in that moment of extreme sorrow she should be seized by the powerful inevitable desire for love which would not be denied.
>
> She was not oblivious of her father's body in the back, but her conscience fortified her with a conviction of the approval of his spirit. He who had seemed to understand her all her life would understand now. Her spirit was finely balanced between the delicate sadness of death and the subdued joy of love and all was the glorious sensation of life triumphant in love over death.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 289)

Nine months later, a child is born. And so in the community of Banana Bottom the drama of life continues: in the midst of life there is death, and in the presence of death life asserts itself.

A disparity in the education and social interests of a couple often puts a severe strain on their marriage, and sometimes leads to a break-up. This is a fairly frequent theme in West Indian fiction. In Wounds in the Flesh (1962), for example, Fitzroy Fraser shows the steady deterioration in the marital relationship between Nora and Balwin Sinclair, a young University graduate. But it is in Garth St. Omer's Nor Any Country (1969) that we are made to see the full effects of such a disparity. The preoccupation of the entire novel is what its title suggests: Peter Breville, the main character, suffers from an acute sense of placelessness ever since his return to the West Indies after several years in England where he obtains a doctoral degree in social studies. As in his other novels, St. Omer dramatizes the condition of his hero through the quality of his emotional relationships, especially through his relationship with his wife, Phyllis. The woman, to whom Peter was initially drawn because of the texture of her hair and the fair complexion of her skin, and in whom he saw the possibility of social advancement, now exists only as a painful memory of a marriage of social expediency, and as an obstacle to his marriage to a white woman and further rise in the hierarchical social structure in the island. Phyllis now revolts him; sex with her is a lustful, dispirited affair; and he is critical of social deficiencies he had never noticed before: 'Again he saw her little finger sticking out away from the knife she held, heard her lapses in grammar, the rising, French-cadenced ends of sentences, the "ouis" and "nons"' (p. 57). Phyllis's simplicity and innocence are seen as drawbacks: 'She had not travelled to another part of the world, had not followed any paths of specialized knowledge, knew no sun that was not hot; she had not discovered, in herself or in others, human deceit and cynicism, had never known the delights of intimate human togetherness' (p. 40). In the company of his friends, Peter finds Phyllis a source of embarrassment, and as he contemplates her, the words of his friend, Clive, who has abandoned his local wife, echo in his head: '"I want a woman I wouldn't be ashamed of. A woman I can take out, man"' (p. 75). In his vision of what might have been possible, Peter sees Anna as that woman, whom he would have married and brought home, just as Colin had returned with Helen. The loss of Anna still rankles in his breast. The memory of her departure, when she accidentally stumbles on evidence of his marriage, rekindles in Peter the resentment he has then felt for Phyllis, and revives his sinister construction of her determination not to terminate her pregnancy as a cunning design. Anna has been, and still is, largely responsible for his repugnance of his wife: 'For the first time he wondered about his unwillingness for Phyllis, his attraction for Anna, the glamour of her background, her degree in Law, her parents' wealth and social position, her acquired taste and elegance. He was not sure how much Anna had been the cause of, or later reinforcement for his attitude towards Phyllis. He was sure only that, having met Anna, he had not wished to let her go' (p. 57).

Nowhere in Nor Any Country does St. Omer give us any reason to sympathize with Peter. We see him at the beginning of the novel more of a coward who succumbs to societal pressure to preserve his social health than as a noble man who marries the woman he gets into trouble because he recognizes his moral responsibility; at the end of the novel, we see him as a beast who openly cheats on his wife, deserts her for long periods, and publicly brutalizes her.

Bita differs from the Sinclairs and the Brevilles, who appear so often in West Indian fiction; she has no wish to tread the weary road to whiteness:

> "I thank God that although I was brought up and educated among white people, I have never wanted to be anything but myself. I take pride in being coloured and different. . . . I cannot imagine anything more tragic than people torturing themselves to be different from their natural unchangeable selves."
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 169)

The several clashes which Bita has with Mrs. Craig are dramatic efforts to maintain her integrity and vital sensibility as much as they are attempts to resist a life that denies expression at the emotional and instinctual level. But it is in her return to the village of Banana Bottom, which she finds 'pleasanter and freer,' and in her marriage to Jubban, who is so much her social and intellectual inferior, that Bita confirms her self-acceptance:

> She had no craving for Jubban to be other than what he was, experienced no hankering for that grace and refinement in him that the local soothsayers said was necessary to an educated person. She liked to play for him for he had a natural feeling for music and showed appreciation of even the most difficult things. But he was in no way a hindrance to the intellectual side of her life. He accepted with natural grace the fact that she should excel in the things to which she had been educated as he should in the work to which he had been trained.
>
> Her music, her reading, her thinking were the flowers of her intelligence and he the root in the earth upon which she was grafted, both nourished by the same soil.
>
> (Banana Bottom, p. 313)

In this passage, which may be said to contain the germ of Banana Bottom, McKay makes it clear that his artistic intention is not simply to glorify the natural way of life at the expense of the intellectual. The union of Jubban and Bita prospers because they remain true to their essential nature, and because neither dismisses the rational faculty: Bita makes pleasurable use of her education and training, and Jubban shares her indulgence with equal pride and joy.

The critical reception of Banana Bottom has been favourable. Dr. Ramchand calls it 'the first classic of West Indian prose,'[19] and the tribute is well deserved. But the fact that McKay is a pioneer in the field of West Indian imaginative literature should not blind us to the shortcomings of the work, however venial they may be. We do not have to read too far into the novel to realize that McKay writes for an overseas audience, and while this may be said for practically all West Indian novelists, the author of Banana Bottom goes to much greater lengths to accommodate his readers. On every aspect of West Indian life, McKay feels obliged to provide an editorial commentary, and he spares no opportunity to satirize the West Indian middle class. Both tendencies sometimes force him to drift away from the immediacy and concreteness of the situation he happens to be describing. This may well be a subjective response, as is the feeling also that McKay makes Bita too ideal a heroine: Bita shows no ambivalence in her cultural identity and experiences no real struggle in the process of self-adaptation. However this may be, Bita proves that it is possible for one to return home in every sense of the word.

Conclusion

Charles de Bonald, the French philosopher and political theoretician, is quoted as having once said:

> Were one to see the literature of a people whose history one does not know, one could tell what this people had been, and were one to read the history of a people whose literature one does not know, one could assume with certainty, which one had been the basic trait of its literature.[1]

From this study of the West Indian novel a clear picture could be drawn of the problems which beset the West Indies and vitiate the social and spiritual life of its people.

Commentaries on the West Indian novel never fail to draw attention to the urgency and intensity with which West Indian novelists are preoccupied with contemporary social and political issues. The novels which we have studied overwhelmingly bear testimony to this preoccupation. To read novel after novel on the socio-economic deprivation of the masses or on the rootlessness of the West Indian and his search for personal identity can become oppressive, even if each author differs in his vision, emphasis, and approach and brings a fresh perspective to the problem. But we need to bear in mind that the novel, more than any other literary form, deals with social issues and values, and in the West Indies where poverty is pervasive, and the 'condition is one of uprootedness,'[2] it is only natural that West Indian novelists should seek to give dramatic expression to these concerns. To quote

Naipaul again: 'Living in a borrowed culture, the West Indian, more than most, needs writers to tell him who he is and where he stands.'[3] Less directly, George Lamming argues that the manifold responsibilities of the literary artist include a genuine analysis and interpretation of 'the world of his social relations, his country, that is, for those who have no direct experience of it.'[4]

But if this study shows that West Indian novelists in general are driven by a common impulse to grapple with the ills of their society, it also reveals that they are fully aware of the fact that the novel is essentially an art form, and not a documentary record or a platform to deliver views on social reform, although, as we have seen, in a good many instances, this awareness slips into the background and social criticism emerges as the main purpose in these novels. Even such works as The Hills Were Joyful Together, Minty Alley, and The Children of Sisyphus, which we have come to regard as brutally realistic in their portrayal of social realities, do not exclude a concern for literary values. Each author tries to ennoble his material and to give expression to human complexity and perplexity.

Furthermore, we have also seen that West Indian novelists are familiar with formal tendencies in contemporary world literature, and are more than willing to apply them in their works. Mendes, for example, shows a Jamesian scrupulosity in his attention to narrative perspective in Pitch Lake; Jean Rhys brilliantly experiments with multiple points of view in Wide Sargasso Sea, as does John Hearne in The Autumn Equinox (1959); Patterson makes use of the confidential diary form in An Absence of Ruins; Naipaul brings his technical mastery of fiction to a climax in The Mimic Men with a successful experiment in the kind of discontinuous narrative mode that has now become the trademark of both Conrad and Faulkner; and George Lamming boldly exploits the resources of language and myth in Of Age and Innocence and Season of Adventure.

Other novelists whose works do not exactly fall within the design of this study, but who probe into areas of human experience that are both timely and timeless in their application include Michael Anthony, John Hearne, and Wilson Harris. Anthony stays away from social and political issues and concentrates on the tremulous world of childhood and adolescence: in The Year in San Fernando (1965) he practises 'an art of fiction of a very subtle kind.'[5] Hearne explores the redemptive possibility of love in a world of violence. The entire oeuvre of Wilson Harris challenges the critical imagination. From Palace of the Peacock (1960) through The Secret Ladder (1963) to Ascent to Omai (1970), the Guyanese author takes us progressively into a strange and fascinating world that is at once identifiable as Guyana and yet may be said to be completely imaginative. Harris makes ashes of our conventional notion of the novel, history, space, time, and person; reshapes our consciousness; refines our conception of reality; sharpens our sensuous perception of the natural world; and revitalizes local myths with symbolic energy and universal significance.

Criticism of the West Indian novel must begin with the acceptance of a deliberate concern with social and political realities, and then proceed to determine the success or failure with which the West Indian novelists manage to embody the issues they deal with in appropriate fictional terms. Formal analysis as the central focus of literary criticism will not do justice to the West Indian novel; nor will a concern only with social relevance. By the same token, any West Indian novelist who makes social documentation his sole objective will quickly fade into oblivion, and the imaginative writer who ignores the anguish of modern West Indian existence will probably suffer the same fate that Achebe predicts for his African counterpart: 'It seems to me that an African writer who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary Africa will end up being completely irrelevant -- like the absurd man in the proverb who leaves his burning house to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames.'[6]

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[2] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (London: Faber and Faber, 1970), p. 70.

[3] G.R. Coulthard, "The West Indies," The Commonwealth Pen, ed. A.L. McLeod (New York: Cornell Univ. Press, 1961), p. 194.

[4] W.I. Carr, "Roger Mais: Design from a Legend," CQ, 13, No. 1 (1967), 19-20.

[5] "Interview with Andrew Dakers," John O'London Weekly (1 May 1953).

[6] "Roger Mais: Design from a Legend," 18.

[7] Mais's 'Notes' on The Hills Were Joyful Together, in the possession of Mrs. Jessie Taylor, who kindly allowed me to make copies of them.

[8] Kenneth Ramchand makes a similar observation on the symbolic function of the hills in the novel, and goes even further to elaborate on the use to which Mais puts them. See An Introduction to the Study of West Indian Literature (Sunbury-on-Thames, Nelson Caribbean, 1976), 17-20.

[9] Roger Mais, "Music Plus Meaning," Pepperpot (February 1940), p. 6. [A defunct magazine: this particular issue can be found at the Institute of Jamaica.]

[10] Kenneth Ramchand, "Black Lightning," Public Opinion, 30 (10 June 1966), p. 7 [Roger Mais Supplement].

[11] "Form and Substance in Fiction," p. 1. [Ts. in the Mais collection in the University of the West Indies Library, Mona Campus, Jamaica.]

[12] Roger Mais, "The Surly Brute," p. 6 [See Mais collection].

[13] Barrie Davies,"The Novels of Roger Mais," IFR, 1, No. 2 (1974), 142.

[14] Roger Mais, "Why I Love and Leave Jamaica" (1950); rpt. in Public Opinion, 30 (10 June 1966).

[15] Marjorie Boulton, The Anatomy of the Novel (London & Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 128.

[16] Ibid., p. 128.

Chapter II

[1] George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p. 39.

[2] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 122.

[3] Sylvia Wynter, "Creole Criticism: A Critique," NWQ, 5, No. 4 (1967), 32.

[4] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 41.

[5] Homecoming (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 92.

[6] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 185.

[7] A.J. Seymour, Edgar Mittelholzer: The Man and His Work (Georgetown, Guyana: The National History and Art Council, 1968), p. 14.

Chapter III

[1] V.S. Naipaul, The Middle Passage (London: Andre Deutsch, 1962), p. 68.

[2] George Lamming, The Pleasures of Exile (London: Michael Joseph, 1960), p. 225.

[3] Reinhard W. Sander, "The Turbulent Thirties in Trinidad: An Interview with Alfred Mendes," WLWE, 12, No. 1 (1973), 74.

[4] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 240.

[5] Ismith Khan, "Dialect in West Indian Literature," in The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas, ed. Lloyd W. Brown (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973), p. 159.

[6] In a corresponding passage in A House for Mr. Biswas (1961), pp. 193-94, Naipaul brutally tears down this illusion.

[7] Barrie Davies, "The Personal Sense of a Society -- Minority View: Aspects of the 'East Indian' Novel in the West Indies," SNNTS, 4, No. 2 (1972), 86. [I am also indebted to Professor Davis for valuable insights into the novels of Ismith Khan, which he imparted to me some years ago when I wrote an undergraduate paper on Khan.]

[8] Ibid., 287.

[9] George Lamming, "The West Indian People," NWQ, 2, No. 2 (1966), 72.

[10] Ibid., 65.

[11] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 136.

[12] George Lamming, "Caribbean Literature: The Black Rock of Africa," African Forum, 1, No. 4 (1966), 32.

[13] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 137.

[14] The Pleasures of Exile (1960), p. 9.

[15] George Lamming, "The West Indian People," 72.

[16] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 141.

[17] John Wickham, "'Review' of Season of Adventure," Bim, 9, No. 33 (1961), 70.

[18] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 161.

[19] Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (London and Harlow: Longmans, Green and Co. Ltd., 1969), pp. 123-24.

[20] The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), 160.

[21] Bill Carr, "A Complex Fate: The Novels of Salkey," The Islands In Between, ed. Louis James (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), p. 106.

[22] Ibid., p. 106.

Chapter IV

[1] The West Indian Societies (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 213-14.

[2] For this experience in Canada, see the novels of Austin Clarke: The Meeting Point (1967), Storm of Fortune (1973), The Bigger Light (1975).

[3] Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (1969), p. 41.

[4] V.S. Naipaul, New Statesman, 6 Dec. 1958, p. 827.

[5] Ibid., p. 826.

[6] For an excellent discussion of the symbolism of A Voyage in the Dark, see Louis James, "Sun Fire -- Painted Fire: Jean Rhys as a Caribbean Novelist," Ariel, 8, No. 3 (1977), 111-27.

[7] Gerald Moore, The Chosen Tongue (1969), p. 104.

[8] It is interesting to compare this recollection of the meanness of West Indian life with the fondness with which Moses recalls the intimacy and togetherness he has known 'back home,' see The Lonely Londoners, pp. 154-55.

[9] Ismith Khan, "Dialect in West Indian Literature" in The Black Writer in Africa and the Americas (1973), p. 159.

Chapter V

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[2] The Chosen Tongue (1969), p. 56.

[3] Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Homecoming (London: Heinemann, 1972), p. 133.

[4] M. Combe Martin, "Review of Of Age and Innocence," Bim, 8, No. 29 (1959), 63.

[5] Homecoming, p. 133.

[6] Ibid., p. 139.

[7] George Lamming, "Caribbean Literature: The Black Rock of Africa," African Forum, 1, No. 4 (1966), 48.

[8] Homecoming, p. 142.

[9] Karl Miller, "V.S. Naipaul and the New Order," Kenyon Review, 29, No. 5 (1967), 694.

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[11] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 13.

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[13] Victor Ramraj, "The All-Embracing Christlike Vision: Tone and Attitude in The Mimic Men," in Common Wealth, ed., Anna Rutherford (Aarhus: Akademisk Boghandel, 1971), p. 132.

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[16] Homecoming, p. 90.

[17] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 259.

[18] Ibid., p. 270.

[19] Ibid., p. 259.

Conclusion

[1] Quoted by Leo Lowenthal, Literature, Popular Culture, and Society (Palo Alto, California: Pacific Books, 1961), p. xi.

[2] Sylvia Wynter, "Reflections on West Indian Writing and Criticism, JJ, 2, No. 4 (1969), 24.

[3] The Middle Passage (1962), p. 68.

[4] "The Negro Writer and His World," CQ, 5 No. 2 (1958), 115.

[5] Kenneth Ramchand, The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), p. 209.

[6] Chinua Achebe, "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause," Morning Yet on Creation Day: Essays (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1975), p. 137.

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